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A
VIRTUOUS
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VIRTUOUS WOMAN

BY

DAPHNE

MUIR

LONDON

CHATTO & WINDUS

1929

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

I THINK we are going to have a literature in South Africa now, because, after nearly three hundred years, the European peoples in the land are trying to weld themselves into a nation, and that is making them very aware of themselves, and very desirous of self-expression.

What is South Africa? In England and America they fancy it is gold and diamonds and elephants and fortune-hunters and prancing blacks and a veld and a sun and a savage darkness. But it is a good deal more than that. It is the most exciting racial tangle in the world: Dutch and English and Jews and Indians and a preponderance of dark peoples questing, bitter and frightened, after civilisation. It is, moreover, a country so thinly populated that the humanity which is a universal thing, and a deeper thing even than race, stands out starkly in it. Finally, life may be a little lonely in South Africa, and a little slow, and there is time and space to see.

Now, therefore, when Mrs. Daphne Muir writes of Dutch life in a South African village, she has something greater before her than schoolboy adventures with gold and elephants and assegais. She has a sample of race and a handful of humanity,

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all ready, set aside, in one little spot, for her to grasp. Is not this concentration, this isolation, an ideal which the greatest of writers have sought ?

Mrs. Muir's Sanni le Roux, the Virtuous Woman of her book and the Bible, sees her husband for whom she has never had any passion as only just below God ; she bears her twelve children ; she reads her Bible ; she longs for the novelty of a brass bed and florid wallpaper and linoleum on the dining-room floor ; she loses her husband, loses her children, changes her home, knows what people mean when they speak of love that comes after marriage, knows what they mean when they speak of one person's life being buried in another person's grave, knows what old Solomon, the Hottentot, means when he says, because he will never again be called ' Filth ' by his dead master, that Solomon is dead . . . for, in the old Boer way, Solomon's master is his master as Sanni's husband is her husband, and it is all typically Dutch of the South Africa that is now passing. But yet it is also more than the chronicle of a little life in a little nation : it is, changing this prejudice for that, something universal. In the end, it isn't of Verdriet alone Daphne Muir is writing or of one Boer woman. . . .

Old Sanni herself never rode in a train, or went out of her little village, or read any book but her Bible ; yet when she was left bereaved, desolate, old and ungainly, still ' at one moment, when speaking of a painted looking-glass, she looked

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quite young.' It may not be a painted looking-glass that flashes the image of youth across other derelict faces, but it is the equivalent of a painted looking-glass.

And other people may have their own tests for books, but this is mine : when I find a book that is about whatever it may be, and yet it has something which makes me feel I am one with the author of it, and one with my friend and my enemy, and one with beings I never have met and never shall meet, then that book is to me a good book. For what greater thing can a writer do than to make life itself—the common life we share—out of the little lives she has created ?

I think this even when a writer hasn't what artists call style. But with everything else—her knowledge of her people, her ironic sympathy, her feeling for truth—Mrs. Muir has style. She has the soundest of all styles : a style appropriate to her subject. And she has a lovely rightness and unity of word and thought, and also a most calm and confident technique. ' Sanni and Sarel had been living for nineteen years on the farm,' she writes quietly as she is passing down a page, ' when they heard, quite casually, of Mrs. le Roux's illness.' In this simple manner, does the reader learn, not only that Sarel and his mother have not met, in their anger, for nineteen years, but also that a new generation is puzzling its way through life.

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This book is the story of three generations. In the beginning there are Sanni and Sarel signifying their betrothal by a nightly vigil over a candle that must burn down to a row of pins stuck in the tallow before they may say good night to one another. Then there are their children, some of whom die; two of whom are killed in the Boer War; one of whom is lost even beyond their prayers because he becomes a Roman Catholic priest. And the ideals of these children are not the ideals of their parents: they read more than the Bible, they go into a bank, or teach, or study medicine, or enter Parliament. The centre of life is not now the church of the village, the family is no longer a coherent body. Some of the children become wealthier than the others, they live better, their wives quarrel. And the next generation comes along. And that finds itself in the Great War, and that wants to go to Cambridge, and that doesn't inevitably hate the English. In the end, Sanni, a child to her children and even to her grandchildren, lies waiting for death and her eightieth birthday, while the women of her family watch, praying, one after another, beside her. They pray, each, for a different thing, but the oldest narrow, fierce, proud daughter-in-law prays that her nation may not go under, her old Boer nation, that Mrs. Muir has here written down better than it has ever been written down before.

SARAH GERTRUDE MILLIN.

*Who can find a virtuous woman ?
For her price is far above rubies.*

. . .

Her children arise up, and call her blessed;

. . .

*Many daughters have done virtuously,
But thou excellest them all.*

THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON

BOOK

I

1



B O O K I

I

THE riding-whip came down smartly over the Hottentot's face, as he knelt at his master's feet, a rag in one hand and a tin of mutton-fat in the other.

'Dog!' said Sarel Le Roux, pleasantly. 'I do not know why I allow such a miserable creature to live at all. Have you not the intelligence to clean a pair of boots properly?'

A dark red flush showed where the blow had been struck, but there was no alteration in the servant's manner as he again applied the greasy rag to his master's boots; nor did it occur to him that it was possible for a white man to treat a black one other than in this manner. For a moment or two he polished industriously, and then sat back on his haunches and surveyed his handiwork.

'It is finished, Master,' he said humbly, and without a word the fair young Dutchman turned, and went from the shadow of the verandah into the blazing sun of a January afternoon. Solomon the Hottentot looked after him as he went. There was no rancour in his heart, only a sense of pride that Fate had permitted him the privilege of being servant to such a man. He loved his young master passionately, with the devotion that generations of

slavery had made almost dog-like. Solomon had been born a slave, and would die a slave, for there is no artificial freedom enforced by Act of Parliament which can change the heart. Every inch of that six and a half feet of bone and muscle added to the pride of Solomon. Every golden hair on that domineering head raised in him a frenzy of adoration. Not the white radiance about the face of God could compare for Solomon with the fair beard of his hero.

Le Roux walked across the Market Square jauntily. The sun blazed down, and he was glad to reach the shelter of his office. He did not quite know what to do with himself, for all his preparations were complete. His house was in order, the necessary papers had been signed, and now there was nothing to do except to wait for the wedding, which was to take place at eleven o'clock on the following morning. Etiquette forbade him to visit Sanni, who was supposed at that moment to be preparing herself, in some mysteriously maidenly way, for the ordeal which lay before her. Sanni was a stranger to the little town of Verdriet, which lay in the middle of the Karoo. She was from the Coast, and on a visit to a school friend, before returning finally to her home from the select seminary in Capetown, where at that time the fashionable girlhood of South Africa blossomed into precocious womanhood, under the tutelage of two austere virgins, who taught them the elements of Ladylike Behaviour, and the

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arts of Music and Painting. Sanni was not quite sixteen when she first came to Verdriet, and the year which had separated her from her family had taken her from a tomboyish childhood into the primness dictated by good taste in the eighteenth-fifties. She was very small, with long red-brown hair, which, when it was unbound, hung to her knees. She had no more pretensions to prettiness than can be claimed by any healthy girl, but she was alive with gaiety. Gaiety hung from her like a cloak of ribbons fluttering in the wind, light and airy. Everything she touched seemed happy, and there was life in her laugh, and life in the quick sparkling way she spoke, in the gestures of her small hands, in the supple movement of her limbs, the ever-changing poise of her head. And there was strength as well as grace in the half-formed curves which offered, as spring promises summer, a rounded maturity of wholesomeness. Her skin was a little tanned, for the African sun turns lily to cream, and cream to apricot, and she was freckled under the eyes and on the large nose which jutted courageously from her face to balance the firm line of her chin.

Sarel Le Roux had been tired of the girls of Verdriet. He had wished to come to the town, rather than stay on his father's farm as overseer. He was sick to death of sheep, bored with riding, bored with shooting, bored with everything. He could never bow his stiff neck to the patriarchal

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yoke of obedience, which was demanded from son to father. He could barely submit to the intolerable surveillance of his spiritual father, the Minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, whose word was law, and who was the legitimate descendant of the Prophets of Israel. So he had come to the town, paid a fee, and opened an office as a Law Agent, knowing no law, and needing to know none. Had he not sufficient book-learning to read and write and keep accounts? But very quickly he had grown tired of that. He had made friends with the young men of Verdriet, and quarrelled with them. He drank with them, argued with them, and then fought with them. Women adored him, but he treated them with courtesy and contempt. And then Sanni had come, and, noting that he seemed attracted by her, his mother, who was as wise as she was commanding, had suggested that every man should settle down, and that he was his father's eldest son, and that his father was dying, and that it was necessary for the family to go on. To add point to her argument, his father did actually die, and when the funeral was over Sarel had allowed himself to be persuaded.

The wooing of a young Boer is not an ardent and impetuous affair. It is more like a game of chess, in which there are moves and counter-moves, giving and taking, pledges, not of affection, but of more solid quality, such as sheep, and land, and water-rights. In those days there was a curious ritual of

Opzittings, nocturnal vigils, in which the betrothed couple sat closed in a room, the table between them, conversing or not conversing as they watched the gradual consumption of a candle, surrounded at its base by a row of pins stuck into the wax, or rather tallow, like a corona of leaves. When the candle had burnt to the point indicated by the pins, the young man would rise, bid the lady a distant farewell, and return the next night to enact a similar performance. Sanni had always been terrified of these séances. The arrival of her father, a jovial good-humoured farmer, had been an event of importance, and one which she understood. She was glad to see him. She did not feel such a stranger since he had come. The reading of contracts had not frightened her, for she had not understood them. The paralysing visit of the Predikant, or Pastor, with the weight of the church behind him, and behind the church the wrath of God, had been cataclysmic but brief. But the Opzitting was ghastly. She would sit and watch Sarel, looming enormous on the fringe of candlelight that made the dark corners even darker. His large hands, his huge shoulders, his Viking head with its outthrust golden beard and cold blue eyes, attracted while they repelled her. Beyond him the shadows moved on the old furniture, the whitewashed walls, the dark rafters. Here and there a piece of polished brass winked at her. She felt stiff and awkward. Timidly she would make a remark, which might or

might not be answered. Then she would fix her eyes on the candle in its brass candlestick, and wonder how long it would take the flame to reach the pins. It was thick, and home-made, with a coarse wick, and a thin blue flame pointed with orange, and it seemed to hypnotise her, so that she sat as if petrified, her hands crossed in her lap, her body rigid, not daring to lean back into unmaidenly ease, her legs stiffening on the hard thonged seat of the chair.

Sarel had not cared for these evenings either. He would rather have been drinking, or in loud talk, with the other youths of the town, bragging as he emptied his glass of brandy, and holding the floor with his boasts, for they all knew he was strong enough to make them good if need be. He loved the garish light of the bar in the little hotel, where the moths flew to the paraffin lamps and died, and the yellow light was given back by tin reflectors fixed behind the wall lamps, and where there was a sense of hot reality. The cool dark room with its one candle, its changing shadow, did not appeal to him. Sanni, attractive enough in the daytime among the other young people of Verdriet, here seemed rather a Symbol than a Person, standing like some hieroglyph for a hidden thing he could not understand. Still, it would not last long, and when they were married there would be none of this flummery, but a good enough light for her to sit and sew by, and no waiting for candles to burn

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out before one went to bed, in the black iron double-bed which knew nothing of springs, but whose framework was joined together with interlacing slats of iron, upon which rested, first a mattress stuffed with carded sheep's wool, and then, regardless of the season, a gigantic feather bed. Still, custom was custom, and Persia and Media were not more severe than the Boers of Africa in insisting that the law should be fulfilled. They were in those days a people torn from mediæval civilisation because of their stamina or obstinacy, divorced by six thousand miles of intraversable sea from progress, an island of humanity, cut off from the rest of the world, unchanging, having no desire to change, scornful of outside influences, because these influences were but the weak outer edge of a civilisation not their own, having continually inside themselves those strange primeval beasts of hate, and tyranny, and domination, which in progressive countries can only rear their dying heads in time of war. It was for this reason that Sarel endured the boredom of the Opzittings. His love for Sanni was no great thing, for sex in him was a trifling affair, to be quenched adequately and then forgotten. A man of his race and time could have no community of interest with the woman he married. Women had certain obvious characteristics, certain obvious duties. They were necessities. In this belief Sarel had been brought up, and being naturally a stupid man, not even the sight of his

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own mother, who with skill and cunning twisted her opportunities to meet her own ends, could alter his conclusion that women had no brains, and consequently no opinions. He was not able to see by the firm mouth, and the candour of the eyes, that in Sanni was the germ of wisdom. In the strong profile he saw no hint of that constant courage which is a greater gift than life. Sanni to him was nothing but a young woman of marriageable age, with sufficient money to make marriage with her a good investment, and sufficient charm to render it a pleasant one.

For a moment as he sat in his office, Le Roux's thoughts wandered to Sanni, and with a certain irritability he wished she would not play the piano so much. Not that that mattered. He could get rid of the piano. Then his mind became occupied with more important affairs. Going to his safe, he drew out a copy of his father's will, and sitting down again, read it intently. He frowned. It was intolerable that that foolish old man should have made no difference in his treatment of his two surviving sons. He, Sarel, the elder, to have no more than that good-for-nothing Klaas! The old man must have been mad. Half the farm. Half the stock. Half the money. It was infamous. Luckily, however, Klaas was a fool, soft and sentimental, fond of women. On moonlight nights, see how he had wandered about the farm, playing his ridiculous mouth-organ to the shadows, risking death at every

step from some cobra or night-adder. And yet when it was a dark night, and one could go out and shoot spring-hares, he would always find some excuse for stopping at home, and never even step outside in the morning to look at the bag. He ought to be easy enough to manage, and, talk of the devil, here he was!

Klaas Le Roux was a very different type of man from his elder brother. He was tall, though next to Sarel he looked only of moderate height. Clean-shaven, with dark eyes and hair, he had something of the appearance of a shy animal. His forehead was high and intellectual, but the character of his face was given by his mouth, which was weak, plaintive, with an appealing droop at the corners, and soft full lips like a child's. He had strong imaginative hands, unscarred by farm work, and smooth, and with the same filbert nails as his brother, though in him these were as suitable as in Sarel they were incongruous.

Hastily concealing the will under some other papers on his desk, Le Roux suggested to Klaas that he should sit down, and asked what he had come for.

'It's about the farm,' said Klaas. 'I hate the farm as much as you do. More. I don't want to sit down in one place all my life. I know our district. There isn't a place in a day's ride I haven't seen. Wherever you look it's the same. Flat country, dotted with absurd hills, for fifty miles.

Then mountains, wherever you look, mountains. I've never been across them, but I'm certain that life for me is on the other side of them.'

Sarel listened to this diatribe patiently. He could be patient, occasionally, when, with the cunning of stupidity, he realised it was to his advantage.

'You may be right,' he said. 'Why don't you take an ox-waggon of stores, and go trading to the North? I will look after the farm, and close down the office, or get someone else to run it if I have to stay in town. Naturally any increases of stock will have to be mine.'

'Stock!' broke in Klaas passionately, 'Increases! God, I'm sick of farming: ugliness, dirt, squalor, smells, utility! Always at the back of everything, utility! And if you're a farmer, you can't look at a green field of lucerne, without wondering how many horses it'll feed. You can't watch the river come down, without wondering how many sheep will be drowned. You can't look at a fruit-tree in flower, without thinking of jam. Take the whole damn farm if you like, and keep it till it rots, and you with it. Give me my ox-waggon, as you suggest. Once I get away from here, I'm not likely to trouble you again.'

'Thanks, old brother,' said Sarel, using the familiar terminology of South African farmers. 'I'll look after your share of the farm, of course, but as for keeping it, well, don't be foolish. When you

come back, you will find that what's yours is yours. After all, one must respect the wishes of the dead, however unjust.'

A shadow darkened the window. Looking up, Sarel saw the head and shoulders of Solomon the Hottentot.

'Well, Filth,' he said amiably, 'what do you want here?'

'Just to see if Master wanted anything,' replied Solomon.

Sarel was accustomed to this, for he knew the native was never happy if he was far away.

'Go back to the kitchen,' he said, 'where you belong. What you want is a good thrashing, and you'll get it too, if I find you prowling round here. Master Klaas is going away on an ox-waggon after the wedding, and I've a good mind to send you with him.'

No expression showed in the dark face, but behind the eyes there was a sudden flame of terror. To be sent away! Solomon's heart stood still at the very thought, as if it had been touched by a cold hand. Away! Away from his master, his white baas, with the other master, whom he hated without reason, except that he was his master's brother. Surely they could not be going to send him away! It had been bad enough when they left the farm, and came to Verdriet, because such civilisation as the town afforded kept him more often away from his master. But entire exile would be worse

than death. He knew better than to say anything, but instead of returning to the kitchen, as he had been ordered, he squatted down under the window, the sun beating down on him pitilessly but unheeded, and listened to the two brothers discussing the details of Klaas's venture.

At last the rays of the sun seemed to weaken a little, and the sun itself dropped behind the hill to the west of the town, bathing the sky in blood, and reflecting a sanguine light through the air from horizon to horizon. The brothers came out of the office together, and Sarel locked the door behind him, but as they stepped from the threshold into the street, they turned and went different ways, with no word of farewell.

Solomon watched until Sarel was at a safe distance, and then followed him, creeping along the houses, and taking advantage of every cover ; but Klaas went alone, and strode down the poplar-lined street, with its furrows of water on each side, until he left the shelter of the trees and began to climb the western hill. As he reached its summit, the last glow of red was fading from the sky, but he did not turn to the west. Instead, he looked to the north, where the mountains still caught a faint tinge of scarlet and purple on their highest ridges. He watched this fading, until the blue of the sky darkened to black, and the outline of the mountains themselves were only carved against the night by the fact that they were unstarred against

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the astral velvet. A small cold wind crept round him, but he took no notice of it, and sat far into the night, his sombre eyes staring to the north.

II

THE church was crowded. Women in black silk spread their voluminous skirts and settled down to enjoy themselves. Men, well-accustomed to the whitewashed walls and carved pulpit—did they not sit there every Sunday and gaze at them?—stared ahead of them, their faces assuming the bovine expression of the bored male. The choir in the gallery above the pulpit waited for the signal from their Choirmaster, who stood, tuning-fork in hand. When he gave it, they would rise, and, taking the note, burst into a long-drawn psalm, as the bride entered through the great stink-wood doors which had cost the congregation so much money. There was no hum of conversation, for one does not discuss mundane subjects in the House of God.

The church itself, a distinguished building with a tall Gothic spire, seemed to disregard its surroundings as much as it disregarded its corrugated iron roof. Whitewashed inside and out, with pointed windows of opaque glass ornamented here and there with a diced pattern of red and blue and yellow, it was the centre of the town. It was more. It was the centre of the district. It stretched forth, north and south, east and west, an influence so

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enormous that nowhere could it be ignored. Every Sunday its pews were filled with its children, colossal men, fat women, great families of their flaxen or dark-haired sons and daughters; every white human being within sound of its cracked bell gathered beneath its shelter, to the greater glory of God. Dazed and sleepy, they heard from its pulpit a language slightly unfamiliar, the original tongue from which their own patois had been constructed. Dazed and sleepy, they realised, with some submerged part of their souls, that their God was a jealous God and visited the sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation. Religion to them was a stark reality, admitting of no deviation from a well-established road. The pathway to Heaven, though stony and narrow, was perfectly well defined, and upon either side gaped Hell, a blazing corporeal Hell of sulphur and brimstone, into which any slip would send them reeling. Christ was not a comprehensible figure to them. They heard of Him, but they could not understand Him. But the wrath of God could be seen in the lightning and heard in the thunder. It was manifest in hail and drought and sickness, a reality discernible by their own eyes, felt by their hands.

Four times in every year the influence of the church extended beyond the notes of its bell, and from a distance of more than a hundred miles the children of the Church who lived too far away

to serve God weekly, came on their ox-waggon, with their servants and many of their household goods, and gathered together to eat the bread and drink the wine which represented the Body and Blood of their unfamiliar Saviour. Town houses were opened by those who were wealthy enough to possess them, but the poor camped in their waggon on a piece of ground provided by the church ; and having mournfully intoned the praises of God, and consolidated the bonds that attached them to Him, they bought a three months' supply of whatever their farms could not provide, and returned into the blue distance from which they had come.

The four-faced clock in the Gothic spire struck eleven. The congregation stiffened in its seats. Naturally the bride would be late, but the striking of the clock was at least an indication that the time of her approach was drawing near. The bridegroom, attended by his groomsmen, was already waiting. The bride's mother had not been able to travel the long distance which divided her from her eldest daughter, but the friends at whose house she was staying had already settled themselves in their pew. Sarel glanced towards the door. Even his unimaginative mind was troubled by some spiritual significance in the ceremony which was about to be performed. As Christ took the Church to wife for her comfort and protection, so did the bridegroom take the bride. For the first

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time it appeared to him that this was more than a commercial and emotional proposition.

The clothes he wore were very smart, but they were not suited to a Tuesday morning. These men, stolidly leaning back in their pews, should have been in their shops and offices, not in the church. These women had work to do. Five or six hours ago their day had begun, and in another ten hours it would be ended, and every moment had its duties, which were being neglected. And he, Sarel Le Roux, was responsible for this upset in the daily routine. He felt the eyes of the congregation fixed upon him, not in admiration, but in reproach. He resented this. He resented Sanni's lateness. He resented the gloating expression of his mother as she sat in the front pew, her dark hair parted neatly under her white cap, her lace collar fastened with a brooch of garnets, the black silk of her dress stiff enough to conceal any hint of her figure. It was stiflingly hot in the church. The sun beat down on the corrugated iron roof, and the windows were not of the kind that are made to open. The smell of perspiration and broadcloth and silk and leather mingled with the stale smell of many other such gatherings. She seemed to disregard it, as she disregarded the heat, as indeed she disregarded everything. She looked cool and satisfied. It occurred to Sarel that she always looked cool and satisfied, and that the things she wanted always happened. She did not seem to have much

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to do with the happening, but the result was invariably what she had originally suggested. He suddenly hated his mother. His thoughts turned to his father, and from him drifted idly to his brother Klaas. They were a couple, those two. Shiftless dreamers.

The church clock struck a quarter past eleven, one sharp brazen note echoing through the high building with a dull sound. The heavy stink-wood doors were flung open by the Verger. The Choir-master gave the note with his tuning-fork, and the choir began their slow nasal chant, and Sanni, unrecognisable in her thick white veil and orange-blossoms, walked, clinging to her father's arm, between the crowded pews. Her eight bridesmaids followed her in pairs, holding their stiff bouquets of artificial flowers awkwardly, four in pink and four in blue, hot and self-conscious. At their entrance, Sarel had risen, and stood with his groomsmen beside him in front of the square pulpit. At the foot of the pulpit was a small table on which the collection plates were kept. Sarel fixed his eyes on this, and repented bitterly that he had ever given way to his mother. Sanni, nearly stifled by the heat under her veil, joined him, and placed her right hand upon his arm. Her father left her and sat down in the pew which had been reserved for him, hot and breathless, thanking God that the next day he would be able to go home.

Up in the pulpit stood the black figure of the

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Predikant, in a silk gown, banded with velvet. At his throat were stiff little white bands of muslin. His lean neck stretched above his collar, supporting a head like an eagle's, with fiery eyes and a great hooked nose. There was no pity in his voice, no congratulation, no love, only the echo of the Voice of God, joining in holy matrimony two persons suitable for the procreation of children who would serve the Church.

The church grew curiously silent, with a tense hush of expectancy, as the choir ceased their singing.

'Let us pray,' rasped the Eagle's voice. There was a great shuffle of heavy shoes, as the men rose to their feet. The women did not stir. They merely shut their eyes and assumed an expression of profound attention.

'Oh, God,' said the Eagle, 'we are gathered together to-day with a solemn object. These young people have but now set their feet on a pathway thorny with trouble, painful and bitter with disillusion. Sorrow will come to them. Sickness will come to them. Misery will come to them. But with Thy help——'

The voice rasped on, and Sanni trembled. She was bitterly cold in the heat of that January day, cold with an inward frigidity that seemed to reach out of the future. Why did the Eagle prophesy misery? Surely one was meant to be happy, sometimes. No one had mentioned happiness to her in

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connection with marriage. Duty and Inevitability had been the key-notes of such conversation as her elders had vouchsafed her on the subject. She had not ventured to speak of Love. That would come after marriage, born probably of servile dependence. And yet, she had met Sarel in the spring, when the passion of life calls to every young thing of the satisfaction of love, and the rapture of surrender. Something had troubled her then, a physical attraction as hard to define as it was to repulse, a certainty that this man was her man, come what would. No one had spoken to her of this, and she had confided it to no one, but through the months of her betrothal, and the disenchantment of those Opzittings and legal interviews, she had nourished it at her heart, close and warm, like a child nestling in the crook of her arm. In the thick night she had woken to think of it, letting her mind linger a little on a passion sensed but unexplained, virginal but human. Now in the big church, quite suddenly, the thing was dead. Beside her stood a stranger, who meant no more to her than one of the stone pillars supporting the roof. Behind her on her left sat her father. He had no meaning either. Her bridesmaids, with their pink and blue fripperies, were like shadows, as artificial as the flowers they carried. Her white veil fell round her like a tent, closing all that was living within its folds. She alone was alive, the last thing left on earth. Everything outside her was drowned in the torrent of

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sound which was God's voice speaking through the Eagle, prophesying misery, raining fire from Heaven upon the fire from Hell which rose to meet it.

Suddenly the sound stopped. There was a shuffling of feet as the men sat down. The women opened their eyes and shifted slightly in their seats. Sanni did not open her eyes. Why should she? She was familiar with the carving on the pulpit, and the pattern of the carpet under her feet. She could not look up, for her veil was heavy and pulled her head forward. It would be an incredible breach of etiquette to look sideways. The Eagle was speaking again. The moment had almost come for her to make her one move in this strange game. He would ask her a question, and she was to nod her head. A sudden resolution woke in her. She would not nod her head. Scandal, parental fury, everlasting disgrace, did not matter. She would not nod her head. No power on earth could make her nod her head.

The time for the question had come. The voice of the Eagle asked it, and paused a moment for the response. Automatically, with denial surging in her heart, Sanni bowed her head in acceptance, and the ceremony continued.

Although perfectly in her senses, Sanni could never afterwards remember what happened between that moment and the moment when she found herself in the vestry, writing her maiden

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name for the last time in the large black book kept for such records. The wedding-breakfast, too, was dim and shadowy to her afterwards. There seemed to be a confusion of white tablecloth, and flowers, and facetious speeches, and food, and fat old gentlemen. And then she had gone with her eight bridesmaids to her room, and they had taken off her wedding finery, and dressed her again, and put on her blue pelisse and bonnet, and then they had gone away and left her, and her friend's mother had come in, and had seemed inclined at first to talk about unapproachable subjects, but had wilted under Sanni's gentle gaze, and gone away also.

These reminiscences were shadowy, and yet all her life she could remember, with vivid clarity, the furniture in the room, the curtains on the windows, the dusty leaves in the garden outside, shrivelled and burnt with heat. She could remember the whitewash on the walls, the colours and pattern of the patchwork quilt on the bed. They seemed fixed in her brain as if she had seen them, not only with her eyes, but with the whole of herself ; as if indeed she had had a hundred eyes, and no intention beyond remembering what those eyes saw. After five minutes, or perhaps an hour, her friend's mother returned, with several other matrons. They rustled in stiffly, with set expressions of congratulation in their pale eyes. They kissed her with hard mouths that seemed to peck at her, and patted her with work-worn hands, and told her

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that she would soon get accustomed to it, and not to be frightened. Sanni writhed under their carresses. They were not real, these women. They were something horrible out of a dream. The praying-mantis on the window was real. How funny he looked, sitting up on his long hind-legs, and folding his short front ones before him in the attitude of prayer, while he bent his triangular head over them devoutly. The Hottentot's God. How funny to have an insect for a God. There was nothing terrible about an insect. This one wasn't even poisonous. Just a little winged creature, three inches long, sitting up all day long and praying, and for what? It didn't look as if his prayer was ever answered. Sanni wondered if it ever would be answered. While she was wondering, she heard someone say, 'You must come now, child,' and mechanically she leaned on the thick arm which stretched out to her like the wing of a bird.

Down the passage she went, down to the crowd which had gathered at the front door. Sarel's new Cape cart was waiting, with its team of four chestnut horses. A little over two hours ago she had been driving round the town with Sarel, after the wedding, in a landau trimmed with white ribbon streamers, followed by two others containing her bridesmaids. There would be no bridesmaids now, no familiar schoolgirl faces, only Sarel. Well, it didn't matter. It was a lovely Cape cart, bright and

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varnished, with leather cushions. The harness was new, too, yellow and raw-looking, the metal-work glittering. On the horses' ears were rosettes of white satin ribbon. The whip was tied with it. Solomon, who was to drive them, had a white rosette in his button-hole, and wore a black pot hat in honour of the occasion. The horses were fresh and restive at the crowd, who were making loud jokes, and laughing. The jokes were not exactly coarse, but the laughter did not seem spontaneous.

Sarel had changed from his wedding clothes. He looked very handsome, Sanni thought, and for a moment a little spark of warmth glowed in her heart. Everybody was kissing her, and she thought she would never get away from them, but suddenly Sarel stooped down and lifted her into the cart. As his hands touched her, the cold settled down about her again. Her pelisse, dictated by fashion, and not by the weather, was of blue cloth. The curls of short hair round her face were damp with perspiration, and stuck to her cheeks and forehead. She could hardly bear the combined weights of her bonnet and her hair, and yet she felt as if suddenly winter had descended again, and the hot desert wind blew from some Polar region of ice. Sarel jumped in beside her, Solomon cracked his whip, the rear horses kicked savagely as the leaders reared, shaking off the men who had been holding their heads. There was a roar of shouting, a scurry of dust, and the Cape cart turned a corner, and set

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out at a steady eight miles an hour to cover the distance to Sarel's farm.

III

It was dark when they arrived at the farm. Sarel climbed stiffly out of the cart, and lifted Sanni down. She was very short, only five feet two, and her feet had not touched the floor; so she had been shaken a good deal by the journey, and was bruised and tired. The native servants had gathered outside the house to welcome their master and his wife. Sarel's mother had left the place in perfect order, for she was a notable housewife, and Sanni realised with a sinking heart that she would have to maintain this standard of perfection. The wood glowed darkly in the candlelight. The brass was spotless, the tiny panes of glass in the windows shone blue and showed that the wooden shutters were closed. Everything was strange. A black woman in a sunbonnet led Sanni to her bedroom, as Sarel went round to the stable with his horses.

Sanni looked about her without interest. All the windows were shut, and the air was hot and vapid. She took off her pelisse and bonnet, and laid them in a drawer of the enormous wardrobe, which filled nearly one side of the room, and matched the equally enormous bed on the other side. Her one candle made a small ball of light in the thick shadow. The roof seemed to weigh her down with

its dark beams. The silver fittings on the wardrobe, polished meticulously every day, showed no mark, though they were spoilt by the coarse black keys. They seemed to catch wisps of light, like planets catching the reflection of some cold and distant sun. The enamelled iron bed was very smart. It replaced a four-poster of wonderful workmanship, which had been considered old-fashioned, and now lay discarded in the loft. The shutters were not slatted, but were of solid wood, and kept out all hint of the night outside. The chairs had seats of thongs, arranged as if for some complicated game of noughts-and-crosses. Sanni felt that the only thing in the world she wanted was to lie down and sleep for ever. Her hands and feet were as cold as ice, but her head was burning. She knew perfectly well that she could not do this, that she must wash, and tidy her hair, and follow the black woman back into the living-room, where the long table was laid for supper beneath the oil lamp, which hung from a stout hook in the central beam of the roof. It was a very long table, which, at a pinch, had been known to seat fourteen, but because the place of a husband was at the head of a table, and the place of his wife was opposite to him, she and Sarel were divided by its entire length.

Sanni looked at the preparation for supper: bread, butter, salt, meat, yes—everything was there. There was nothing for her to do. Her mother-in-law had been very thorough. She went

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and stood in front of the great open fireplace, where, in the winter, a fire of veld-wood would burn on the floor. The yellow light from the lamp was pitiless to the lines of fatigue under her eyes, and round her mouth, and threw an ugly shadow across her face from her big nose. She was so small that her masses of hair made her look top-heavy. The glare back from the white tablecloth gave her complexion a sallow tinge, and she felt awkward and out of place. Was her whole life going to be like this—strange, and tiring? She hoped not.

Sarel came in and took his place at the head of the table, and she sank into a chair at the foot. The native woman placed the joint of cold meat and some plates in front of her husband, and in front of Sanni herself, a covered dish of eggs. Sarel said the long grace dictated by custom, and Sanni served him. She herself was too tired to eat, but for form's sake took on her plate a small portion of the food before her. It was tepid and greasy, and she could not swallow it, but Sarel ate amazingly, sending back his plate two and three times, and afterwards carving for himself great slabs of mutton from the joint before him. The black woman, whose name it appeared was Sophie, brought in coffee, which they drank from large cups, diluting it with goats' milk, and huge spoonfuls of brown sugar. The coffee was made of dried carrots and beans, with a little coffee, and some chicory,

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roasted on the farm, and ground when it was needed. The smell was curious, but it was hot and liquid, and easy to swallow, and Sanni took it gratefully.

After supper a bell was sounded, and the servants came trooping in for evening prayers. They were of all sizes, and all mixtures of colour, eight or ten of them, from Sophie, who was coal-black, to Solomon, who was yellow, where his original colour could be traced through the ingrained dirt.

They stood respectfully while Sarel read a completely unintelligible portion of the book of Job, and then knelt, as he prayed God to avert His wrath from that upright household. Sanni felt that if she closed her eyes she would never open them again, so she watched, from under her lowered eyelids, as her husband dispensed spiritual sustenance to his servants. The smell of the natives was rank, and Sanni loathed their fuzzy heads, and the pink soles of their black feet, upturned as they knelt. They were dressed in rags, slovenly, filthy, covered by print pinafores in the case of the women, but none the less obvious. They had thick lips, and animal faces, and the whites of their eyes were yellow. Sanni cringed a little away from them. The natives near her home had been Zulus, magnificent specimens, like bronze gods and goddesses. At school, she had not noticed much what the servants were like. She had no other experience.

At last the Family Prayers were over. They all

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rose from their knees, and the servants filed out. Sarel was a little flushed and self-conscious, for this was the first time that he had appeared before his servants in this light, as hitherto his mother, when his father was too ill, had read the Bible and supplicated the Creator. Sanni stood uncertain as to her immediate actions, until Sarel, looking up, noticed her awkwardness, and suggested that she might like to unpack. Sophie would show her, he said, into which part of the wardrobe to put his clothes. He then stretched himself on the thonged settee which ran along one side of the room, and lit his pipe.

The calm bedroom seemed restful after the light and smell of the oil lamp in the living-room. It smelled of feathers and soap, instead of food and paraffin, and servants, and tobacco, and the acrid smell of stables which had come in with Sarel. Sarel had been wrong about Sophie. As soon as prayers were over, all the servants had gone home to their huts, next to the sheep-kraals, and unless Sanni herself intended to wash up the supper things, they would have to remain till morning. She was half tempted to leave them, but her mother-in-law was not the woman to let such slovenliness pass unchided, should she hear of it, and Sanni knew perfectly that that old warrior would have left many a spy in her former home. She went back to the dining-room, and began to clear the table. The clatter roused Sarel, who

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looked up for a moment and smiled at her. He had a charming smile, candid and engaging, like a shy child, and Sanni blushed painfully as she caught his eye. She had to wash up in cold water, and in very little of it, and left the dishes piled on the table, as she did not yet know their places. But the task did not take long and soon she was back in her bedroom again.

She unpacked Sarel's clothes methodically and put them in that half of the wardrobe that smelt of tobacco, rightly judging that that had been his father's. She then began to unpack her own clothes, but had hardly taken more than a quarter of the contents from the small box which contained all her possessions, when she was interrupted by Sarel, who, having finished his pipe, had knocked it out into the fireplace, turned out the lamp, and was coming to bed.

He came into the room slowly, and stood for a moment framed in the doorway, which he filled. He was a magnificent man—enormous, handsome, every inch of his body showing good breeding and fine condition. His massive head, with its out-thrust beard, its straight nose, and well-set ears, gave him a look of brilliant intelligence, which was entirely misleading. His hands, though slightly roughened, were a beautiful shape, with long, pointed fingers, and nails which he polished regularly. The candlelight picked out the gold hairs at his wrists, against the shadow of his cuffs, and

the strong line of his neck, riding massively on his shoulders. He looked at Sanni kindly, and told her to get ready for bed. Obediently she sat down in front of the dressing-table, with the two candles, and began to unplait her hair. A dim reflection of plain, timid, girlhood looked back at her from the dull silver surface. As she sat, her hair hung to the floor, and lifting a thick strand of it on to her lap, she began to brush it.

Sarel sat on the edge of the bed, and watched her. He rather liked her hair, with its dull red light, and chocolate shadows, until it reminded him of her wedding-veil, and that brought back the feeling of repugnance he had felt in the church, as she had entered on her father's arm, and he had caught the expression of smug satisfaction on his mother's mouth. He pulled off his boots thoughtfully, and threw them across the room towards the door where Sophie would find them when she brought in the coffee in the morning, and take them away for Solomon to clean. By the time he had taken off all his clothes, and got into his night-shirt, Sanni had finished brushing her hair. She plaited it into two plaits, and tied the ends with little bows of ribbon. Then she too, began to undress.

Sarel knelt down by the side of the bed and said his prayers. After that he cleaned his teeth and washed his face and hands. He then got into bed and lay watching Sanni, as she continued her preparations for the night. When she had washed

and put on her white calico nightgown, with its high collared yoke, and long sleeves, she sat on the edge of the bed, and took up her Bible. She had read a little every night since she was confirmed and was now at the beginning of the Book of Deuteronomy. Slowly her eyes traced the words and she tried to fix her thoughts on what she was reading. It was impossible. What was going to happen? Something was going to happen, she knew. Would it be terrible or wonderful? Why didn't Sarel say something? She couldn't go on reading Deuteronomy for ever, and yet it seemed so unmaidenly to blow out the candle and creep into bed. 'And the Lord said unto Moses——' what on earth did it matter *what* the Lord said unto Moses? That was all long ago, thousands and thousands of years ago, and she and Sarel were alive *now*, and they had been married that day, and they were alone in the house. She was wicked to think things like this, when she was reading the Bible. 'And the Lord said unto Moses——' The candle guttered.

Suddenly from behind her, came a shapely hand which pinched out the flame. The Bible fell to the floor in the darkness, and two powerful arms dragged her backwards across the bed, and two firm lips rained kisses on her face until she was breathless, and Heaven and Earth seemed to reel together, as she felt Sarel's strong heart pounding against her breast.

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Half an hour afterwards, she lay, too tired to sleep, wondering why people ever got married. Pain and fatigue seemed to fill the room. Her head throbbed, and the feather bed on which she lay seemed stifling. She dared not light the candle. She dared not open the windows, though the one thing she longed for was to look at the soft darkness of the night. She felt nervous, excited, as if she had been swung up towards some climax which she had never reached. Her thoughts seemed to stretch away, and then recoil, like threads of elastic stinging home with their insistence. Her mouth was parched, her limbs stiff. Dare she get up and get water, or would she wake Sarel? She listened to his even breathing for a long time, and then decided to make the venture. But as she was about to creep from the bed, she thought she heard him stir, and hastily drew back the foot which she had extended to the floor. If she got out of bed he might wake. Anything would be better than that. She lay quite still, trembling inwardly. With a sigh he turned over, and his arm fell across her. The weight was intolerable, but she did not move, until in a little while he had turned away from her. She slipped into a more comfortable position, and prayed half-heartedly to a mythical Christ, until she remembered that He had said God was love, and thereby made the Deity even more terrible.

She was half unconscious with the sheer burden of fatigue, when the door opened at six the next

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morning, and Sophie entered with two cups of lukewarm coffee. She opened the shutters so that the sun streamed into the room, and carefully closed the windows again, then she picked up Sarel's boots, and took them away. Sanni pretended to be asleep, but she need not have been afraid. Sarel got up at once, and dressed, washing as before no more than his face and hands. He brushed his hair, cleaned his nails with a penknife and polished them carefully with a silk handkerchief. Then he walked over to Sanni's side of the bed, and bending, kissed her awkwardly.

'You had better get up,' he said. 'There's a lot of work to do on a farm. I'll be back to breakfast at eight.'

The door shut behind him and Sanni got out of bed. For a moment the floor rushed up at her, and she thought she was going to faint. She sat down again on the bed, and steadied herself with an effort of will. Then she got up, and automatically began to dress herself. Her life as a married woman had begun.

BOOK

II

had followed him within a year, had provided no interest for her, for he was of a vacillating, dreamy disposition like his father.

It is no pleasure to a woman of spirit to tyrannise easily, and Mrs. Le Roux was above all things a woman of spirit. So easy had been her dominion over her third husband that nobody in Verdriet had seen her in action. Life had gone forward smoothly for she had been unopposed, and her wish was law. In consequence of this she had passed for a peaceable woman, stern but just, without friends and without enemies, untouched alike by scandal and affection, pure with that rigid virtue so esteemed by people of her period.

She had been a stranger to Verdriet when her last husband had brought her to his father's house. Of her past, beyond the fact of her two previous marriages, the village women could gather little. She was not one who spoke much, either of herself or of her neighbours, and none were idle enough or bold enough to question her upon matters so personal. She had lived mainly at the farm, coming to the town only on rare occasions, though in that small community her tall, spare figure, and penetrating eyes were known to everyone.

She had thought a long time before deciding to build her new house beside the one which was now to belong to Sarel and Sanni, but at last she had hired the builders and begun the work. All her life she had longed for a foeman worthy of her steel,

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and at last in this fair giant, begotten of her blood and spirit, she thought she had found him. For twenty-one years she had watched Sarel carefully. His turbulent childhood, his violent adolescence, and his precocious maturity, had thrilled her. After years of passionate longing, she had conceived a man-child. She had given him a temper hot and wicked. She had given him strength. She had given him health, she had given him pride, she had made, in fact, a machine, capable of anything, and she looked forward to the joy of controlling him, making of him what she herself would have become had she not been a woman.

From February to September she watched the building of her house, and superintended the workmen herself. The lazy natives, accustomed to loitering over their work, and gabbling in the sunshine, soon found that this would not do for old Mrs. Le Roux. There was no such thing as an architect in Verdriet, for technically the builder was the architect, and the builder, though at first inclined to argue, was soon cowed into silence. The foundations were dug, and Mrs. Le Roux watched them being dug. She watched the rough stone being put into place. She watched the bricks, of which the walls were made, and inspected the mortar, with which they were joined together. She went down to the carpenter's shop, and superintended the construction of her door and window-frames. Hardly a nail was hammered into the woodwork, hardly a

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screw was twisted into the corrugated iron roof, but Mrs. Le Roux was watching it. Her dark, fiery eyes were more dreaded by the workmen than the kicks or curses of the Overseer, and they trembled as they saw her coming. She would rise at four, and prowls about the half-finished house, until the men arrived to begin their work, and though she would leave them at times, in the pursuit of her more normal avocation, no amount of bread-making, or jam-making, or cake-making, or brandy and raisin-making, could keep her for long from her passionate interest in house-making.

The departure of Klaas, soon after the ground had been broken for the new house, left his mother completely unaffected, and made very little stir in the village. The people of Verdriet had not been impressed by Klaas. They did not share his passion for beauty, or his dislike for work and sport. The friends of the Le Roux family admitted him to their houses on sufferance rather than hospitably, and of this he was glad, for their houses made him feel uncomfortable, trapped, and he hated sitting with the men, smoking and silent, as they collected on the stoep at evening, with their huge cups of coffee, and their large pipes of foul tobacco, drinking, spitting, and occasionally grunting. Even more he hated joining the boys and girls, with their giggles and rough horse-play, and elephantine love-making. They seemed so coarse and stupid. They seemed to take reality,

and turn it into *unreality*, a gross distortion of life.

The people of Verdriet seemed to Klaas like ghosts waiking, or even something more dead than ghosts, creatures who had never lived, who never would live, more dead than the plants, or rocks, or the sand in the river bed, dead beyond all possibility of future life, because the germ of life was not in them. No rain of Beauty could descend on them, and give them life, because they were unrecptive. The mountains were alive, the sky was alive, and the thirsty drought-stricken trees were alive, even when their roots had shrunk for want of water, and their leaves had fallen dustily to the dust. But these people were dead, and the miasma of their breath was Death itself. They spoke to him, and he felt chilled. He looked at their houses. The white walls and grey iron roofs were like the walls and roofs of tombs. They grew geraniums in pots on their verandahs, and small green plants that the women kept alive with constant 'care. These had life, in the way that phosphorus seems to have life on a dead body, born of putrefaction.

How he longed to get away, away from the terrible town, to a place where there was air to breathe! He didn't want people, he didn't want comfort, he wanted life, nature, God. He didn't believe what he heard about God in church on Sundays. If God was a jealous God, why had he tented the world so grandly, walled it with magic,

sent winds that blew across it, stars that lit it? Why did He pour destruction upon the innocent and guilty alike? Why did He damn men into the Devil's clutches for any wayward step, and then sacrifice His own Son to save them, when, if He knew everything, He must have known that they would fall, and could have prevented the lapse by never making any Devil? Klaas had his own ideas about God, but he was not his mother's son without having enough horse-sense to keep them to himself. Though he was less terrified of the eagle-faced Pastor than most other people, he had a wholesome dread of his displeasure, and was not going to invite an argument which could have only one end, when, by a few simple acts of conformity, he could have peace.

When Sanni came to Verdriet, he had noticed that she was not quite like the young women he knew. She was gayer, more innocent. She seemed alive among them, and he looked at her with interest. But when she had become betrothed to Sarel, she faded for him into the mass, and sank into the commonplace, like a stone into a well. He had been at the wedding, but it had meant nothing to him, for his mind was filled with the glory of his future. Ever since his father's death he had been scheming to get away. He had turned like a weather-cock, as the winds blew. He would go East, he would go North, he would go West, he would go South. What did it matter where one

went, or what one did, so long as one went away? He did not know what he would find, but he knew he would find something, a force perhaps, which would tear his life from the stone in which it was embedded like a fossil, and fling him this way and that, between heaven and earth, like a wandering cloud.

Night after night he had lain awake, trying to think of how he might persuade Sarel to let him go away. He had always been dominated by Sarel. Sarel was the elder, and the stronger, and had commanded him, from the time he could walk; and he had obeyed Sarel to the best of his ability, though he often lapsed into dreams and forgot, and was cuffed back into reality, and cursed for a fool. Day after day he had slouched listlessly about the farm, trying to think up arguments that he could bring to bear on Sarel, arguments so convincing that they would persuade even that giant block-head that resistance was impossible, when God's voice called a man from far away. He had not attempted to make an ally of his mother, for he knew perfectly that she despised him, and clove to her first-born. Once, when his father was alive, he had appealed to him, eloquently, passionately, but his father was a weak reed that had long been broken in the grasp of his mother, and from him he got no definite answer. He did not realise, when his father's will was read, that the answer had at last been given, and that he was rich and free, with

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no one to say him nay if he wished to go, and no one to pack him off if he wished to stay. He was so accustomed to a subservient position in the family, that now he maintained, by sheer habit, a yoke which he could legitimately have flung aside.

He had not been completely normal for some days after Sarel's unexpected suggestion about ox-waggons and trade, and it had really been his mother who had made the practical arrangements for his trek. She had bought ox-waggons, engaged experienced boys, bought oxen, bought stores, and early in February everything was ready for Klaas's departure. She had bought him a new Bible, in which she had written his name and the date, in a crabbed irregular hand ; and had given him her blessing, not because she thought it was much use to him, but because it was customary and right, and Mrs. Le Roux knew herself above all things to be upright and Christian. In her heart of hearts, a place so small and secret that she herself had never guessed at its existence she hoped her younger son would not come back ; but in her expressed sentiments at the moment of parting, there was no hint of this.

It was still dark on the February morning that Klaas chose for setting out. The first blue line had not yet come into the sky, and only the paling of the stars indicated the approach of morning. Though a dreamer, and an idealist, Klaas was farm-bred, and knew the Boer's way of managing

his servants. He had arranged to start at day-break, but not being able to sleep, he had risen at three o'clock, climbed into his clothes, and felt his way out of the house. The waggons were already packed, so he took his rifle, and the new Bible his mother had given him, and strode down to where the natives were sleeping, huddled under the waggons at the out-span ground on the borders of the town, kicked them awake, and told them to hurry up and yoke the oxen. This was done with much shouting and cracking of whips, and before very long the two ox-waggon, glorious with new paint and white tents, lumbered away from Verdriet on the first stage of their journey.

By the time the sun had risen, they were well on their way. The speed of an ox-waggon is about three miles an hour, and Klaas had no idea as to how far he intended to travel. It might be five hundred miles. It might be a thousand. He would go on as long as there was a road, and when there was no longer a road, he would still go on. He had no intention of trading. He would go on until somewhere he would find a corner where no other man had ever been, and there he would settle and look across a world in which he and God alone were white men, and if any other white men came, he would saddle his horse, yoke up his oxen, and trek on again, until life or the world came to an end. Somewhere on the road he would find beauty, and, at the end of it peace. Peace he knew by name,

for the Eagle had often preached of it as a divine possession not given to Man. But of beauty, the beauty he desired, no man had ever told him. But it knocked at his spirit continually, and gave him no rest. The six miles or so that he had travelled had been a long way, though the little town was still full in sight. They were not six ordinary miles—they were the whole distance between two separate existences. He had gone to bed last night as Klaas Le Roux, an inhabitant of Verdriet, and now, at daybreak the next morning, he was Klaas Le Roux, an inhabitant of the world. He had seen the sun rise, apricot turning to amber, amber to green, and green to blue in the sky above him. The windows of Heaven had shut and the stars no longer looked through the curtains. The mountains sprang up, all around the horizon, into points of pink light, until he felt that he was surrounded by a ring of fire, through which he must break his way.

The urchins in front of the leading oxen tugged at the strings, and Klaas thought as he rode round them, that the children seemed to be pulling wooden animals, carved like the waggons, painted brown, with great white flecks on their flanks and shoulders. The tents of the waggons were like bubbles, and might disappear as easily. Not yet had reality come to meet him. But one day, he would find a track in the veld that would seem real and lead him to the desired country.

It was time for breakfast, and Klaas felt hungry.

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So the oxen were unyoked and a fire built by the side of the road, and coffee was made, and meal-meal porridge for the natives was warmed up, and Klaas himself dipped the hard biscuit his mother had baked into his mug of coffee, and chewed a piece of biltong, the stiff dried venison that was the staple food of the pioneer, and gloried in his freedom. Then the oxen were yoked again, and the horse saddled, the whips were cracked, the wheels creaked and turned, and the bellying bubbles of canvas again moved northwards, while the town of Verdriet to the south stood out solidly, as if it would last for ever, and remain constant when the purple mountains far away lost their sharp edges, and crumbled into dust.

II

IN the early Spring, Sarel and Sanni moved into the house in Verdriet. Like all the village houses, theirs was built straight on to the street, only separated from the water-furrow by a high stone stoep. The old Boers loved to live on the very edge of passing traffic, for they had no amusements, and the only diversity in the day's happenings was the possible advent of a stranger. The town itself was built round a square, one half of it containing the market sheds, and the bell, which was sounded every night at eight o'clock, to confine the natives in their location on the other side of the river. All

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the servants came from the location in the early morning and returned there before night, and any black face seen in the shadows of the streets after the ringing of that fateful bell, was more than likely to spend the night in jail. The other half of the square belonged to the church, and in the middle of it stood that great white structure which had so dominating an influence. It was built in the form of a square cross, and enclosed in a low wall. The churchyard was an institution unknown to it, for, as it dealt with the living, so would God in His infinite justice, deal with the dead, and the cemetery was nearly a mile away. Round the square trees had been planted, mostly pepper-trees, which can easily withstand the drought, and now and then an acacia, or a grotesque casuarina, would break the monotony. In some of the streets there were poplar trees, but on the square they would not thrive.

Sarel's house was one of the best in the town. It had a verandah over its stoep, of curved corrugated iron, painted in broad chocolate and white stripes, and supported by wooden stays, which connected it to a latticed balustrade of chocolate and white painted iron slats. The general effect was like a cage, more especially as the lattice-work was continued in a small gate immediately in front of the front door, which was usually kept shut. The inevitable stand of pot-plants covered the wall beside the front door, the struggling flowers blooming and

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dying valiantly, their roots cramped in wooden boxes or disused tins, or cracked earthenware.

Most of the houses in Verdriet were built on the same plan. A passage led from the front door straight through the house to the garden-door at the back, with two rooms on each side of it. The first room on the left was the best bedroom, the first on the right was the parlour. Each of these rooms had one window only, which opened on the front of the house. Next to the parlour was the living-room, and next to the best bedroom, another bedroom. At the back of the house was the back stoep. The kitchen was built on to the living-room, and a succession of further bedrooms was built on to the spare bedroom. The four main rooms were floored with wood. If the owners were very rich, possibly the additional bedrooms might also be floored. Otherwise, the floors were of beaten mud. The Le Roux's were rich enough to have had a wooden floor even in the kitchen, but good taste prevented such ostentation, and the floor was, like all kitchen floors, uneven and dusty, swept daily, and kept cool by the simple process of sprinkling it with water. There was no stove, but an open fireplace, with pots and trivets and a spit, and the bread was baked in an oven outside in the yard, which looked like a grave, and which was heated overnight by a fire inside it, that was scraped out before the introduction of the bread.

When Sanni came to Verdriet to live, she was

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preparing for the birth of her first baby, and in spite of the fact that childbirth was so ordinary an affair, that it needed no special attention beyond the presence of some capable matron, she felt a little frightened at the prospect. A shadow seemed to hang over her, and she was haunted by the feeling that she would have to go down into a dark place, alone, and terrified, to bring up a new life in her arms. She was working very hard, for she had not yet enough experience to do her housekeeping with the minimum of exertion. She feared and admired her mother-in-law, and would have died rather than lower the standard of cleanliness which that autocrat had set upon the house. Sanni longed for new furniture, like her mother-in-law had bought for *her* new house, varnished bedroom furniture, a brass bed, and wallpaper in riotous designs of ribbons and roses, and a piece of linoleum on the living-room floor. She did not care for the heavy old furniture, and whitewashed walls, and the dark floor. She found no charm in the brasses that took so long to polish, the copper that glowed redly under her fingers. She liked enamel, and pictures, and longed inarticulately for an oleograph of Queen Victoria, like the one which ornamented the wall of the living-room in the new house. But she realised, quite clearly, that to mention such desires to Sarel would result in nothing but a flame of temper, and she resigned herself to do without them. She had never been a needlewoman, so she

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pricked her fingers over the unaccustomed baby-clothes, straining her eyes under the oil lamp at night, long after Sarel had gone to bed, and she didn't even find time to cry because the only piece of furniture that Mrs. Le Roux had taken away with her was the piano upon which she had never known how to play.

She had visitors in the afternoon, stiff ladies who paid formal calls upon her. They inquired about her condition, which embarrassed her, and gave her advice, which embarrassed her still further, and spoke among themselves of past similar events, to the details of which she listened with horrified interest. The next day she would see them making their way down the side street which led to her mother-in-law's front door, and she would know with ghastly certainty that they were discussing her, and comparing the two houses. Not that her mother-in-law would permit any direct discussion of any member of her family in her house, for she was proud, and a gentlewoman, but the atmosphere of discussion and comparison was breathed out by the very walls whenever Sanni entered the house, and she felt enmity continually about her.

Old Mrs. Le Roux was by no means the terror that Sanni thought her, and, had Sanni herself been more friendly and yielding, things might have been better between them. But as it was, the younger woman resented the domination and patronage of

the elder, and the elder found that in some obscure way her love for Sarel contributed largely to her dislike for his wife. Realising that Sanni would not graciously sink her own opinions, and accept advice which, though well-meant and sincere, sounded like a command, she offered none, but contented herself with sitting on her back stoep, and watching Sanni's house obliquely, as she knitted her endless pairs of stockings, waiting for trouble, like some lean vigilant spider, waiting, in the shadow of a twig, with sardonic certainty, for a fly to become entangled in her web. She had chosen Sanni for Sarel deliberately, because she had liked the girl, liked her innocent freshness, her joyousness, because she could see, through youth and inexperience, the sterling metal of Sanni's character. She had chosen Sanni less as a wife for Sarel than as a mother for Sarel's children, for she knew him to be reckless and violent, and realised that he must at all costs not marry a nonentity. She would have liked to have been friends with Sanni, but since the difference in their ages prevented this, and since Sanni resented the position into which custom forced her with regard to her mother-in-law, Mrs. Le Roux made no effort to make the girl's life more tolerable. When the trouble she expected came, it would be interesting to see how Sanni met it. Already she was influencing Sarel for the good. She curbed his boasting, and steadied him generally. She was shaping well, thought the Spider,

and should be worth watching. To certain people things happen ; spiritual adventures, and Mrs. Le Roux knew this, and with her shrewd dark eyes she had seen, even at her first meeting, that Sanni was of these. It was impossible to say how the test would come which would try Sanni to the limit of her endurance, but old Mrs. Le Roux was aware, with intuitive knowledge, that come it must.

Sanni misunderstood her mother-in-law completely, and this did not aid her in making a success of her new surroundings. A smouldering resentment grew up in her against this thin-lipped woman, so self-possessed, so sure, who put her at such a disadvantage. Her only comfort was her baby. It was to be born the last week in October, and she hoped desperately that it would be a girl. If it were a boy, she felt certain it would be like Sarel, the world's child, not her own, but a daughter, when it ceased to be a baby, would not leave her for other people. It would be a companion, a friend. It would give her love, sympathy, understanding. It would be her ally against that stern monitress, its grandmother. She would teach it, guard it, worship it. Sometimes she could almost see it growing up, first a toddling child, then a young girl, shy, and dark, and graceful, then a woman, with children of her own, but always hers, her baby. Secretly she had already christened it Sara, because she loved the name, and every night when she said her prayers she would pray to God

to make Sara a good girl, and let her grow up to be a comfort to her parents. Then she would read her chapter, blow out her candle, and creep into bed beside Sarel, whose heavy breathing showed him to be already asleep.

On the 27th of October, Sanni was delivered of twin boys, and did not recover with the rapidity which was expected of her. It was a fortnight before she was out of bed, and a month before she was able to stand with Sarel by the silver font in the church, while the Eagle christened her two sons David and Adam. As Sanni stood in front of the pulpit, where in Dutch Reformed churches the movable font is always placed (for christening ceremonies are interpolated once a month in the middle of the ordinary Sunday morning service), she remembered vividly her feelings on the occasion of her marriage, and thought of them with a half-pitying smile, as a woman of middle-age might look back on the ridiculous ideas of her childhood. What a long time ago it seemed ; and what a long way she had travelled since then. It seemed to her that her girlhood was infinitely distant, and that she could only see it as one might look at a picture through a dirty glass, certain only of the broad outlines and guessing at, or ignoring, the details. She looked much older, certainly, for her features were of the kind that are girlish only in expression, and her heavy hair made her look older than she need have done.

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Sarel also remembered his wedding-day, and as the two native nursemaids, barefooted and sheepish, carried back the babies into the vestry, while he and Sanni returned to their seats for the sermon, he stole a look at his mother, and saw on her face the same expression of smug satisfaction which he had seen there before. This time he did not hate her for that contented look, for he felt that he understood it better than he had done before. At the time of his wedding he must have had an exaggerated idea of married life, he thought. After all, it made very little difference to a man. The house was the same, life was the same, and the servants were the same, and now he had two sons to carry on the tradition of his family. Sanni was not unsightly, and as amenable to reason as most women. He stretched himself in his seat, and composed himself to listen, as the Eagle read out his text from the great Bible resting on its velvet cushion, from which depended a square of embroidery, proclaiming to the world that it was the duty of the Church's children to fear the Lord.

A gleam of sunshine came through one of the closed windows, where the stained-glass dice fretted its uniform whiteness, and a patch of blue and red and yellow light floated over Sanni's lap, as she sat listening to the exhortations thundered about her ears. It was difficult to keep her attention fixed on what the Eagle was saying. She was desperately tired, for the month before her babies'

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birth, she had been house-moving, and settling with some difficulty into her new home. Her labour had been protracted, and she was already, though nursing two lusty children, continuing the ordinary tasks of her daily life. The Eagle, unusually for him, had chosen his text from the New Testament, and was building upon it a subtle structure, to show that the children christened that day were called to the service of God. Sanni wondered idly whether the two other mothers whose babies had been christened, were as tired as she was. One of them had been a girl-baby, a small dark creature who had made no sound at the impact of cold water on its forehead. Her sons had roared lustily at the touch of the Eagle's fingers and Sanni had been proud, because children who scream at their christenings grow up into good Christians. She watched the coloured sunlight moving across her knee. The air thrilled and trembled into waves of sound at the Eagle's eloquence, as he explained the duty of parents towards their children, and to God, Who had so graciously given them those children, for the preservation of the world's morality and His own exalted Name. Sanni loved her babies. She thought of them tenderly now, and wondered whether Clara and Jantje, the two embarrassed nursemaids, had changed their christening-clothes as soon as they had arrived home. She hoped she would bring them up properly, into good boys who would love their parents, and be a credit to them.

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She hoped they would be clever. She was sorry about Sara, but it could not be helped. One had the children God sent one, and one was thankful.

What a long time the Eagle was preaching. Surely he had never preached quite such a long time before. She felt sick, and her nose looked pinched and blue at the corners. At her side Sarel was nearly asleep. The coloured sunlight had left her now and travelled to him. A bar of it lay across his gold hair, and another on one of his large, beautiful hands. She liked Sarel, which was lucky, as it is wicked not to love one's husband. He was nearly always satisfied when one tried hard to please him. It was months now since he had struck her. Yes, taking one thing with another, she was a very lucky woman.

Mrs. Le Roux had her own pew, right in the front of the church, for she was a little deaf though she would not admit it, and being a religious woman, she liked hearing the Eagle's sermons, and joining with her strong clear voice in the monotony of the hymns. From where she sat, she could see Sarel and Sanni, and to-day she watched them with pride and pleasure, filled with admiration at the justice of God, Who had given her in return for sixty-five years of undeviating rectitude, her magnificent Sarel and his twin sons. She hoped Sanni would bring the children up well. If there were more children, she would take the next one, especially if it were a girl. She had had no daughter,

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but she had formulated a great many ideas as to the upbringing and education of female children, and it would be a pleasure to bring them into practice. Certainly the Eagle was preaching a very long sermon, and the Sunday dinner had probably reached a stage at which it required her personal attention. She was very particular about her Sunday dinner, for on Sundays she insisted that Sarel and Sanni should come home with her after church and eat their midday meal under her roof. Sanni was always awed by this weekly sacrifice, but Sarel enjoyed it, for he was beginning to feel his feet, and dare even at times wander into argument with his mother upon minor points. Whereat the old lady rejoiced greatly, as if she saw, bud by bud unfolding, the flower of her life.

The Eagle was certainly preaching a long sermon. He didn't mind the heat, and probably the flies, which buzzed here and there among the congregation, had not the temerity to rise to the pulpit. There was no movement in the church, beyond an occasional child shifting in its seat, and sternly admonished by its parents. Some of the very old people had left off sucking peppermints, or taking snuff, and sunk into a light slumber. The service was always a long one on christening Sundays, and there was no reason why God should be deprived of His weekly banquet of piety, because a few human children had been presented to Him. The boys of the congregation, their ill-cut hair well

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greased, their weekly clean collars apparently holding up the sunburn of their faces, continued their Sunday task of making sheep's eyes at the girls, and the girls continued coyly to respond, whenever they could do so unseen by their watchful parents.

At last the sermon was over. The men rose to their feet for the final prayer and the women joined them for the last psalm. Through the outstretched hand of the Eagle, the never-failing fountain of God's benediction poured upon His chosen people, and they solemnly filed out of the church into the noon-day sun, and from there to their hot Sunday dinners, and thereafter to the dark sanctuary of their bedrooms, where they slept heavily till the late afternoon.

III

WITHIN four years, Sanni had three more children. A girl, who had been christened Henrietta after her grandmother, and two boys, one of whom had died in infancy. Willem, the surviving boy, was fair and sturdy like the twins, who were becoming a great handful about the house. According to her plan, old Mrs. Le Roux had taken Hetty to live with her, as soon as she was weaned, and had also taken Sophie from Sanni's service. The loss of Sophie was a blow to Sanni, for she had relied on her in many directions, but she comforted herself by thinking that little Hetty needed the black nurse

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more than she did. Naturally Sanni saw her daughter every day, and could not deny that her grandmother was as loving and careful of the child as she herself could have been. And yet the resentment which Sanni had always felt for her mother-in-law still smouldered hotly, and she longed for Hetty with an ache which pride made her conceal, and which from repression became only more intense.

Mrs. Le Roux was now sixty-nine years old and still held herself as stiffly as a ram-rod. Her deafness had increased a little, but in every other respect she remained unaltered. Her passion for Sarel had become an obsession, and apparently he could do no wrong. He had discovered now, that he could more than hold his own in argument with her, and this discovery had made him as overbearing towards her as he was to the rest of the world. She delighted in this, and though in other people she would not brook the slightest disagreement, she permitted him to ride roughshod over her upon all matters. Only one subject they never discussed, and that was religion.

Sanni's simple piety could not rise to Mrs. Le Roux's exalted faith in the all-guiding hand of God, but she was nevertheless content, that what *was*, was because He wished it to be so, and that in return for His goodness in permitting Mankind to live, and maintain its life, and reproduce its life, Mankind should offer Him prayers, night and

morning, and incessantly pursue the morality He had instituted.

Sarel was handsomer than ever—a little more set as to figure, a little more flamboyant as to beard. Like his mother, he made no real friends, for everyone feared his hectoring manner, and disliked his domineering tone. He and his mother fell more and more into one another's company, and found it to their liking. Sanni, who was of a more gregarious disposition, might have made friends, but she had little time for social intercourse, as she was always either pregnant or nursing a child. She had plenty to do, though, for she had three sons to clothe, as well as herself and her husband, and she never became very expert, in spite of long experience, so what she sewed was very often unpicked, and sewed again, and the light charm of her girlhood was put off, like a cloak that has become ragged, and replaced by an expression of resignation, which turned to one of love and solicitude when she looked at her children.

The return of Klaas Le Roux at this time was not welcomed with any pleasure by the members of his family. He had walked into his mother's house one cold July night, as she sat eating her solitary supper in the living-room. He had announced his return casually, and she had as casually accepted it, and offered him food, and made a bed for him, and waited until he slept. And then she had opened the door on to the back stoep, and

walked across the garden to Sarel's house, and gone inside, and knocked at his bedroom door, terrifying Sanni, who feared that Hetty had come to some harm. Sarel dressed himself, and taking his mother into the kitchen, which was warmer than the rest of the house, he set a candle on the table, and put two chairs beside it, and sat down and talked to her for a long time, over the implications of his brother's arrival. The situation presented endless difficulties. The mean streak in Sarel's nature made him hate the thought of restoring his brother's patrimony, and the overmastering love of the woman for her elder son made her blind to his violence and cupidity. She was prepared to accept any argument, to foster any argument in fact, which would show Klaas to be in the wrong, and Sarel in the right. When at last she went back to her own house, they had come to no satisfying conclusion, but had decided that the best thing to do would be to wait and allow Klaas to make the first move.

Klaas was not of the same opinion. He showed no disposition to make any move at all, which disconcerted Sarel, though his mother had arrived at an age when it is easier to wait. Klaas, too, did not make friends, except with his brother's children, who were always pleased to play with him. He liked the wild twins, scrambling and fighting like healthy little animals, but Hetty he loved. She was a strange child, pale and dark, with an

unchildish capacity for sitting still and keeping clean, which delighted her grandmother, who attributed it to her excellent training. Klaas would sit for hours with Hetty, teaching her to speak, and holding long conversations with her in a baby-language which apparently had some definite meaning for them, though no one else could understand a word of it. He would sit on the back stoep, staring at the garden, its clumps of privet and its fruit-trees, its roses, and its gravel paths, and feel a strange satisfying beauty creeping up to him out of the sun-dried earth. He never told anyone what the result of his trek had been. He never mentioned his adventures. None of his servants had returned with him, and the two waggons, with their oxen and merchandise, had disappeared as entirely as if those white bubbles of canvas had lifted them into the air and hidden them among the clouds. Looking out into the garden, he wondered why it had been so necessary to go so far to find peace, when peace seemed to be enclosed here, between these two houses, in the very village he had left to seek it. He had gone away, with a thousand undefined illusions, vague dreams of a new life, the only life, beyond the mountains. And beyond the mountains, everywhere, he had found the same life from which he had run away. Always unreality, always a passionate interest in material things, things that pass, and change, and die, and disappear. Nowhere an interest in things that last.

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Or was there nothing lasting? Was that Something that mirrored itself in his own heart, a Nothing? Was the whole universe moving, without pattern, all chance? He read his mother's Bible. That told him nothing. He tried to talk to his fellowmen when he met them along the road. They were willing to speak of game, or crops, or rain, but of nothing else. Had they no belief in anything, but crops and rain and game? Apparently not. Then he had lived alone, trying to find in himself the Thing he sought. He could not find it, and doubt took for him the place of beauty, and unrest came to him instead of peace, and at last he had come home.

He used to watch Sanni as she worked in the garden, or about the back of her house, and sometimes he would walk across the garden, and talk to her, and tell her about strange places that he never mentioned to anyone else; or he would call her out of the house at sunset to look at the sky, or tell her to listen to a bird singing in the fig-trees. And she found him very pleasant company, as she sat sewing clothes for the next baby, or patching Adam's trousers, or making male clothes for Willem, who was still staggering about in the feminine frippery of petticoats. And she used to find him useful, too, in lifting heavy things for her, or picking fruit, or doing a thousand and one things that she found fatiguing in the heat, as summer came into sudden being. And Sarel, becoming assured that Klaas

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was not anxious to demand the land and money left in his brother's charge, was pleased to see him too, and encouraged him to keep Sanni company, and would often leave him in his house, while he himself went over to talk to his mother. And, quite gradually, Sanni began to love Klaas, so gradually indeed, that she herself did not know it.

She did not love him passionately, for all the passion in her nature had gone long ago to its grave, buried under the dark sods of domesticity and continuous motherhood. But she loved him as she might have done her own brothers, had she known them better; almost, sometimes, as she loved her own sons, with a soft awakening of tenderness in her heart at the thought of him, and a faint singing in her heart at the sight of him, and a bounding welcome in her heart at the sound of him. There was no disloyalty to Sarel in Sanni's love for Klaas, because her spirit was incapable of disloyalty. Sarel was her husband, the father of her children, the head of her household. She feared and respected him, honoured him, obeyed him, responded to his every wish, worked for him. He was beyond disloyalty. He stood only just below God, his own sons grouped about him, infinitely above her. No one could share the feeling she felt for him. To have considered Klaas for one moment from the point of view she took up with regard to Sarel, would have been a sacrilege so monstrous that the thought of it never entered her head. But

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she loved Klaas, as she might have loved a woman, had she known one well enough to love, seeing in him the companion she had never known. He was like a book to her. She had not read a book except the Bible, since she left school. He was like some strange interesting book, that one knows almost by heart, and yet reads again, just for the pleasure of seeing the printed words. She was going to have another baby, too, and always, as her time approached, she felt the same need for a supporting hand, and the same fear of dark places.

As the summer grew hotter, and the rains began, Klaas's former energies revived. His sense of peace passed away from him, and his desire to wander returned in full force. The unreality of Verdriet struck him anew as he wandered about its streets, watching the poplar-leaves flutter down into the water-furrows, and sail away, like flat little boats, with a rearing mast of stalk. There were many new houses going up in the town, all made of the same burnt brick, on stone foundations, nearly all white-washed. He disliked the blinding glare of them, and the ugly grey of their unpainted corrugated iron roofs. He disliked the pepper-trees, which flourished everywhere, sickening of their uniformity of pinnate leaf and pink berry. The only things in the place that gave him any pleasure were the casuarina trees, bowing grotesque heads of blue-green hair over gnarled and stunted trunks, and showing an occasional insignificant plume of pink flowers.

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Sometimes he went down to the river, a barren sandy chasm with high banks widely separated, and among the rocks and sand between them, a tiny trickle of water, like blood in the veins of a struldbrug, widening at places into pools, where the native women did the village washing, kneeling beside the stream and spreading the clothes on the flat grey rocks to soap them, and then seizing them up in both hands, and, instead of rubbing them, slapping them against the stones, and then rinsing them out in the pool. The grey lather would float away down the stream to the next washer-woman, and so on for a quarter of a mile to the drift, or ford, and there slop over the road and so, on, till it disappeared in the distance. No one lived on the banks of the river, because when it came down, it would often bring with it such a fury of dark water that it swept over its high banks and flooded the veld on either side of it. Only the native location was near the river, on the side of a little hill, connected with the town by a path across the bed of the stream, or, for use in time of flood, a perilous swaying bridge of planks, balanced on iron posts above the water.

As in all towns, however small, the meaner houses were on the outskirts, and Verdriet had tiny brick hovels clinging to the fringes of its white-washed respectability. These were the houses of the poor whites, who would not make enough money to live comfortably.

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together in a confusion of babies and poultry, in one or two airless rooms, under a flat tin roof, often made of paraffin tins opened out and joined together, squalidly healthy in body, and psychologically aments.

Disillusion had brought a certain amount of peace to Klaas, but in the companionship of Sanni, he had found a tonic which restored his battered idealism. With the reawakening of this, Verdriet grew daily more intolerable. Once again he saw a country of illusion, far away, and real to him, but this time it was not across the blue mountains, it was in the heart of Sanni. If he could make her love him, and take her away with him, away from Sarel and his mother, away from this terrible town, away from the church which squatted in its centre like an idol, away from continual child-bearing and housekeeping—surely somewhere together they would be able to find Reality. Klaas's love for Sanni was in no way sexual. Women disgusted him, and the thought of Sanni in any physical connection would have been nauseating. He wanted her to himself. He did not want the world continually coming between them, as in the circumstances it was bound to do. He liked the children, but he hated to think that they were Sanni's children, because that seemed to make more insistent the fact that she was a woman. He was unaware of her pregnancy, though it was plainly evident. He knew it it might have

made him turn from her with distaste. It did not occur to him that in the eyes of his relations and acquaintances, of indeed, his whole nation, he was guilty of a terrible sin, and one which would inevitably lead him to burn in Hell through everlasting ages. All his thoughts were now occupied with the problem of how to take possession of Sanni's soul. He wanted her to think of him, and of nothing else. As another man might wish to possess the body of the woman he loved, so Klaas desired to possess her spirit. There was no torture to which he would not have subjected Sanni and himself, if it would have produced the effect he wanted. Realising something of the relative values of mind and body, he had leapt with his usual lack of balance to the conclusion that it was mind alone that mattered. Could he so capture Sanni that the imaginations of her heart were his, he felt that he would reach the goal of his life, the ultimate reality. He did not put these thoughts into words, for he was uneducated, and belonged to a race to whom words are difficult at all times, but he stretched fingers of thought, incoherent, barely created, towards Sanni, and strove to draw her towards him. He knew she could never be his as long as she lived in Verdriet, where day and night she answered the call of her husband and children. Her house, her servants, her whole life, came between them; but if he could take her away, he would love her and serve her, guard her, protect

her, work for her, so that she should have nothing to do all day long but think of him. That was his ambition.

Unfortunately for Klaas, he did not realise that two gigantic factors were against the realisation of this ambition. In the first place, Sanni was quite incapable of the kind of love he desired, and even had she gone away with him, she would have been a greater disappointment to him than any that had hitherto come his way. In the second place, her hereditary prejudices were so strong, and she was so sensitive to the influence of her environment, that if her married life had been a continuous Hell, she would not have left it.

It was in February that Klaas determined to put his fortune to the test. Sanni had been very tender towards him, for she had not failed to notice his fits of melancholy brooding, and had entirely misunderstood their cause. Sarel had gone over to his mother's house after supper. The heat was stifling, and all along the horizon lightning played in and out of the mountains, and faint thunder rolled across the arch of the sky. There was no promise of rain, but the earth cried out for water like a dying man, and the night seemed to press down like a lid. Sanni and Klaas sat on the back stoep under a grape-vine trellis, whose leaves were parched and curled about the heavy bunches of blue fruit. For once Sanni had listened to Klaas's persuasions, and left her sewing beside the lamp in the living-room,

to sit in the hot darkness and wait for the breeze that was so long in coming. Her hair was heavy on her head, and her feet had swollen in her ill-cut shoes. She had had a trying day, and did not want to hear Klaas's talk at all, but wished he would keep silent, and let her rest. She could have slept, sitting upright in that hard chair, if she had only been left alone. Klaas bothered her, in the same way that the children bothered her. He always seemed, nowadays, to be pulling at the skirts of her mind, trying to drag her this way and that, to demand her attention, when she had a hundred and one more important matters to attend to. He really was getting a nuisance, she thought. Why couldn't he go out and work like other men, and marry, and settle down, instead of behaving in this peculiar way? His words seemed to come to her from a long distance off, like a cricket chirping at the bottom of the garden, or the croaking of frogs in the water-furrow that ran past the front door. She did not pay any attention to his words: she would know by his tone when he demanded an answer, and it was quite easy to make some non-committal noise that might mean yes or no, or express amusement, or surprise. Sanni never spoke if she could help it. It seemed waste of time, when there was so much to do.

Suddenly a new vibration in his voice roused her to listen more carefully to what he was saying, and to her horror she found that he was making to her

a proposal black as the night with infamy and disloyalty. He was asking her to desert her husband, to leave her children, to break with one action the whole fabric of her life—a fabric which had been built up upon the foundation of other similar lives, carefully and perfectly balanced upon a corner-stone of morality, laid down by God himself. And for what? To go away with him.

For a moment she sat, not believing her own ears, but there could be no doubt. Horror-stricken, she listened to his halting words. She could not rise from her chair, and her heart pounded, terrified, in her breast. Desperately she rallied herself, but her limbs refused their function. With one supreme effort she forced herself into action, and thrusting Klaas aside, rushed panting and breathless across the garden, shouting her husband's name.

IV

SAREL, on hearing Sanni's story, horsewhipped his brother very nearly to death, and that end was indeed only prevented by Mrs. Le Roux, who had rushed out into the garden and dragged her younger son away, preventing Sarel from continuing to strike him by the interposition of her own body. Even in his most violent temper Sarel would never dare to strike his mother, but a furious rage against her took him, and he cursed her, swearing that if she tended his brother in her house, neither

he nor anything that was his, would ever enter it again.

Mrs. Le Roux adored Sarel and hated Klaas, but she was not the woman to be dictated to, and by her own son. Calling up all her strength, she lifted the unconscious Klaas in her arms, and dragged him across the garden. Arriving at the door, she told Sanni, who was still cowering in the living-room, what Sarel had said, and advised her to go home at once. If Sarel wanted Hetty, she added, the child would be sent home. If not, she could remain. Beyond Hetty, Mrs. Le Roux had no desire ever to see her son, or her son's wife, again, and it would be well if Sanni would keep her sons in her own house.

Sanni was terrified at being flung from her usual existence into this whirlpool of passions. She knew her husband, and realised that he would not go back on his word. She knew her mother-in-law, and realised that it was from her Sarel had inherited his temperament. She caught at the hint of weakness in Mrs. Le Roux's voice as she spoke of Hetty, and the first friendly feeling she had felt for the older woman woke in her now. If Sanni had any influence with Sarel, Hetty should remain with her grandmother. She stood by the table, one hand resting on its top, when suddenly a wave of pain descended upon her, and she realised that though she was only seven months pregnant, her labour had begun.

The next thirty-six hours were a confused nightmare of darkness and agony, with shifting figures moving continually about her, and an eternity of suffering that seemed to have no end. It did have an end, though, and Sanni came back to life on the second morning after Klaas's avowal, to find that she had again given birth to twins, neither of whom survived more than a few hours. The Eagle was hastily summoned, and the babies baptised, in order that they might be buried in consecrated ground. Sanni lay in her bed and felt grateful to the Eagle. She did not know what would have happened to the babies' bodies if they had died unchristened. Their souls would have been damned, she knew, but what *did* people do with babies' bodies, new little babies, who should still have been fluttering their wings in her own womb, had not disaster overtaken them, and torn them from her.

She supposed the scandal must already be known in the town, and wondered vaguely what Sarel and his mother would do about the large peach-tree which stood exactly between the two houses. She was very tired. It seemed to her that she had been tired ever since the day of her marriage. Lying in the hot airless room, her wedding-day, and the time immediately preceding it, seemed much more clear and vivid than the six years since. She could remember every detail of her own wedding-dress, and even of the dresses of her bridesmaids. They had all left Verdriet by now, married to farmers in

their own, or some neighbouring, district. Sometimes she saw one or two of them at Nachemaal, and had even had them to drink coffee with her in her dark parlour, but she had as little real interest in them as they had in her. She began to think about God. How kind it was of Him to have sent the Eagle to baptise her babies. She was very much afraid that there would be trouble with the Church over Sarel's quarrel with his mother, and trouble with the Church meant a very great deal more than it sounds. Was it in the Bible that one was safe in the arms of Jesus, or was it only a hymn? In the darkness she seemed to see Christ looking at her, pitying and helpless, His outstretched crucified arms incapable of holding anything, His sagging head bowed with its crown of thorns. Sadly the eyes looked at her, and sadly she returned their gaze. It was the speech of one sufferer to another, and Sanni took comfort in the thought that God Himself had promised a Heavenly Kingdom, without pain, to be inherited by all His faithful. Sarel had not been to see her. She wondered vaguely where he was, but did not worry over his non-appearance. An old black woman brought Adam and David in to see her, but they were awed by her unaccustomed attitude and the darkened room, and struggled to get away.

Outside in the sunshine, Verdriet hummed like a hive of bees. It was not often that they had a scandal to entertain them, but this was a double-

barrelled sensation. The men congregated in groups towards sunset, and drank their coffee with gusto, as they discussed the situation. Sarel Le Roux had nearly killed his brother Klaas. Nobody knew why. Mrs. Le Roux had turned Sarel out of her house. Nobody knew why. Sarel had gone about all day, blind drunk, kicking every native within reach, and cursing his mother and brother, until he had finally collapsed and gone to sleep in his office where, presumably, he still was, as no one had ventured in to enrage the lion further. Behind lace curtains, the ladies of Verdriet discussed the same subject as their husbands. The experienced matron, who had been called to Sanni the morning before by a scared servant, could only give them details of gynæcological significance, which, though intensely interesting at any other time, were now merely irritating. In addition to a scandal there was a mystery, and the whole town was on the alert to find out what it was. But how could they find out? Only four people could tell them, and these four were not likely to be willing to satisfy their curiosity. The Eagle would know in due course, for he knew everything, but he was not a man from whom that sort of information could be extracted. So the people of Verdriet made up their minds to wait patiently, until one day the matter would come to light, and in the meantime to evolve many engaging theories, which might, or might not, hold water.

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For the first time in her life, Mrs. Le Roux found herself at a disadvantage. Klaas had again disappeared. She hoped his disappearance on this occasion would be permanent, and in this Fate was on her side, for no word from Klaas ever reached her, nor did she ever speak of him again voluntarily. Her immediate preoccupation was not with her younger son, but with her elder. For the past six years her whole life had become bound up in Sarel. With the exception of Hetty, he was her sole interest. Her seventy years for the first time seemed to weigh upon her. She knew that neither she nor Sarel would go back on the words they had spoken during their quarrel. More than ever she hated Klaas for having come between them, but she felt that if Sarel would only sit again beneath her roof, she would forgive him his curses, and love him even more than she had done before. She would not need an apology from him, nor even an explanation. He had only to come in and sit down, as he had done a thousand times before, and she would forgive everything, forget everything, as if it had never been. But she knew that this spirit in her was one born of age, and recognised, with painful clarity, that forty years ago she would have forgiven nothing and forgotten nothing, and that between her seventy years and Sarel's thirty, there was a great gulf fixed.

Sarel pulled himself together with difficulty and got up from the floor where he had been sleeping.

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Under cover of the darkness, he shambled across the square from his office to his house, and was surprised to find a light in the living-room, and a strange woman sitting sewing by the table. He looked at her stupidly for a moment, and then recognised that she was the wife of one of his neighbours, a colourless woman, with whom Sanni had a slight acquaintance.

‘ Good-evening, Mr. Le Roux,’ said the woman. ‘ I made a bed for you in the spare room. Your wife is very ill.’

Sarel continued to stare stupidly at her. He knew nothing of the events of the past two days, and he was not curious. His head was aching and he felt sick. With his dishevelled hair and red-rimmed eyes, he looked like a great bear dressed in human clothes. And like a bear he lurched awkwardly across the passage to the spare room, and falling on to the bed, went to sleep again. In the morning he felt better, and when old Solomon the Hottentot brought him ‘ his early coffee, because the cook was busy with Sanni, he got some sort of garbled version from him, of what had happened. He was sober now, but still furious with his mother for her interference between him and Klaas. By God—he would show her. Turning on him like that. And for what? For the sake of that damned scoundrel, that good-for-nothing bastard! Rage took him by the throat and almost choked him. It was not rage with Klaas, for in his

heart Sarel despised Klaas too much to be really angry with him, but against his mother. All his life he had counted on her alliance against the outside world, though he had quarrelled with her on minor matters, and now she had failed him. Sanni did not even enter into his thoughts with regard to the fight. She had only provided an excuse for him to do what he had subconsciously longed for ever since he had become a man. But his mother! He could not get over his mother. He changed his clothes slowly, trying to persuade himself that she had always been against him, and favoured Klaas. He recalled childish incidents, and deliberately perverted them in his mind to support his new idea. Gradually he built up a fabric of hatred against her, strengthening his resolve never again to darken her doors, or exchange a word with her. Fortunately for her, he did not think of Hetty, or he would instantly have removed her from her grandmother's care ; but his children were so little a part of his life at that time, that he did not realise what the little girl meant to the old woman.

When he had breakfasted with his two elder sons, whom he found atrociously noisy and dirty when deprived of the watchful care of their mother, he went up the passage to Sanni's room. She greeted him calmly, and told him of the Eagle's visit. She also told him that her neighbour had, in his absence, arranged for the babies' funeral, which would have to take place that day. Sarel

did not like the way Sanni looked at him. There seemed to be a new quality in her eyes, which made him feel a little awkward and uneasy. He was ashamed of himself, too, for having got drunk after thrashing Klaas, so he did not stay long, but went out to see the builder about putting up a good wall, instead of a gravel-walk, between his property and his mother's.

In the afternoon he followed the coffins of his latest-born to the family plot in the little cemetery, with its thin cypresses standing between the mounds like the flames of dark candles, rooted in death. After the funeral, the Eagle invited him to come home to the Parsonage with him, and realising that this invitation was more in the nature of a command, Sarel accompanied him to his house, which differed from the other houses in Verdriet in that it had a windmill which pumped water for the garden, besides being very much larger than the houses of the congregation. Sitting opposite the Eagle, Sarel felt nervous and abashed. He did not know what to do with his feet and hands and hat. He was too young to be able to meet this man on equal terms. The Elders and the Deacons trembled before him, and the rich farmers propitiated him with gifts of turkeys and sucking-pigs, and bags of wheat, and bales of lucerne, and preserves made by their fat wives. Sarel felt intimidated, and wished he had not come. He wished he could think of some reason for immediate departure. To bolster

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up his courage he thought of the way his mother had treated him, and a little cold rage ousted some of the nervousness from his heart. He realised that the Eagle was questioning him with a definite object, but he could not quite understand what that object was, so that he was not able to guard his replies as he would have wished, and he committed the indiscretion of announcing firmly that nothing would ever induce him to speak to his mother again.

While Sarel had been interviewing the builder that morning, old Mrs. Le Roux, being a wise general, had been interviewing the Predikant, knowing that if Sarel's obstinacy were to be crushed, the alliance of the Church would be an indispensable part of her tactics, and, as it is always easy for the old to enlist the sympathies of their contemporaries against the young, she had succeeded in getting the Eagle entirely on her side. Had Sarel realised in this interview at the Parsonage what the strength of the Church was, he would never have resisted it; and the battle with his mother would have been over almost before it had begun. But it was not easy for him to swallow his pride, or control his temper, and he finally became so vehement that the Eagle told him that he was no longer to present himself at the Communion table, for the body and blood of Christ were not for men with hate in their hearts. 'Vengeance is of the Lord,' said the Eagle, 'and men should live in brotherly love.'

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Sarel left the house more than ever angry with his mother. The Communion service meant nothing to him, but to be forbidden to appear at it was, next to expulsion from the Church, the most frightful disgrace which could be inflicted on a member of the congregation. Sarel's sense of the injustice of life sprang into being. Hitherto he had looked upon life, because things had always gone in his favour, as a just and noble institution ordained of God, in which the virtuous were rewarded and the wicked punished. Now it appeared to him that he, having been foully wronged by his brother and mother, was also being wronged by his Creator. Had he not rightfully thrashed Klaas? He should have killed him. Was not Klaas morally responsible for the death of his two children, who had been buried that very afternoon? Did not the Bible say an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth? What right had his mother to prevent him from killing Klaas if he wanted to? Not that he had been going to kill him, but supposing he had? She had called him a murderer, too, and that rankled. He was not a murderer—when had he killed anybody? Klaas was a murderer. Hadn't Klaas killed his two children? And where was Klaas? That was another thing. Skulking in some hole, like a snake, waiting to come out and kill some more children. It was hard luck on Sanni, poor girl. She had a hard life, God knew, but what could *he* do about it? Women had their duties as well as men. He thought of

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Sanni. How happy she had been when he first knew her! She hadn't seemed quite so gay lately. He didn't see that he could do anything about it. Or perhaps he could. . . . What would Sanni like? He went into his office, and sitting down at his desk, wrote out an order to a Capetown firm for a piano. It was the first present he had ever given his wife.

BOOK

III

B O O K III

I

IT is not wise to offend the Church, for the Church is the visible and authentic Mill of God, which can grind exceeding small. When it became known that Sarel Le Roux had been refused the Communion, such friends as he had had turned against him, and his business as a Law Agent had become practically non-existent. Thinking over this had only embittered Sarel. He knew instinctively that every man has the right to protect his wife's honour, and he felt the injustice of the treatment he was receiving. He drank a good deal, and brandy made him moody and irritable, so that he was harsh with his children, who lived in dread of him. Adam and David would run when they saw him coming, and even the little ones crept into corners when he entered the room. He noticed this, and instead of becoming kinder, he was sterner than ever. After a year or two, during which he never set foot inside the Church, he had shut his office in Verdriet, let his town house to an Englishman, the manager of a newly-opened bank, and taken his family and servants back to the farm. He would have done so long before he actually made the move, but he could not bear the thought of his mother's triumph. He judged her entirely by him-

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self and measured her hatred by his own, making no allowance for their differences of age and sex. Giving way to Sanni in the matter of Hetty, he had allowed the child to remain with her grandmother, but only on condition that it should never be allowed inside his house. Sanni was not permitted to visit her daughter, and, though she could hear her voice over the wall, and saw her occasionally in the street, there was no intercourse between them.

Sarel thought a great deal about his mother, and every thought fixed his resolution more deeply. Never again would he speak to her. And yet, sometimes, an overmastering impulse would come over him to be near her, to hear her voice, and see the light of battle in those shrewd dark eyes; to watch her spare frame, as she moved here and there about the room, always certain, steadfast. He missed his mother terribly in those two years before he left Verdriet. It had become such a habit with him to discuss with her the happenings of every day, to listen to her caustic comments on their neighbours' actions, that sometimes his feet would almost turn to the path which had led from his back stoep to hers, and which now ended in that forbidding wall. Perhaps he might have taken that path, and scaled the wall which he himself had built between them, had it not been for the galling thought that people would say he had knuckled under to the Church, that he was beaten by a woman, that he was a weak fool who did not know his own mind.

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So he checked his feet, and would have checked his thoughts had he been able, but he was not, and with the hate which he built up in his heart for his mother, there grew a passionate love for her and longing for her, which he would not admit even to himself, and resolutely put away from him.

Sarel and Sanni had been living for nineteen years on the farm, when they first heard, quite casually, of Mrs. Le Roux's illness. For ninety years her strong body had marched in step with her strong mind, and now, though her mind was as clear as ever, and her will as unfailing, her limbs no longer answered the call of her spirit. The news had come to them from a young man who was a relative of Mrs. Le Roux's second husband. He had recently come to live in Verdriet, and had fallen in love with Hetty, who was then in her twenties. He had hoped to speak to Sarel about a match between them, but as soon as he had broached his subject, Sarel had flown into a flaming temper, refusing to discuss the matter, and telling the young man to make arrangements with the girl's grandmother, as he had no control over her. He had then flung out of the house, and marched aimlessly away over the veld, not returning until long after the would-be suitor had been pacified by Sanni, and sent away.

Andries Stastok, for such was the youth's name, made a good impression on Sanni. She liked the way he spoke of Hetty, and was pleased to find that

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he loved the girl deeply, and had no material interest in marrying her. She gave him her blessing and apologised for her husband's rudeness. In the twenty years since his quarrel with his mother, she had apologised so often for Sarel that she no longer flinched at the necessity. She made coffee for Andries, and asked him the news of the town, where her only visits had been made when she drove in to have her children christened. Sarel had taken no interest in these christenings and it was an unspoken rule that she never referred to them, choosing the opportunity to go into town when Sarel was driving in for stores, or on business connected with the selling of wool. Though he had never re-entered the Church since his dispute with the Eagle, Sarel had made no effort to prevent Sanni from obtaining whatever religious consolation she could find there, and Sanni was grateful for this, for more and more her mind dwelt lovingly on God. She read her Bible assiduously, whenever she had time, and taught her children as best she could. They were all sons, except Hetty, and a fine handful she had, with Adam and David grown to manhood, and Willem also, and four more small sons of varying ages. She loved them tenderly, and many a time stood between them and their father's injustice and anger, sometimes at no small bodily risk to herself.

The years had not dealt kindly with Sanni. Her face was lined and careworn, and her hands shapeless and roughened with work. She had grown very

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stout, too, and her frequent pregnancies had made her almost grotesque in outline, for her figure had no time to recover its contour before she had to leave her bed, and take up the thread of her life again. Her hair was still abundant and beautiful, with hardly a thread of grey in it, and it was her one vanity; for however great was her fatigue and however long her day had been, she always brushed it carefully and affectionately before she went to bed. Her expression had completely changed to one of gentle beauty and resignation, which softened the harsh outline of her features, and gave her a look almost of holiness. Her unchanging eyes were still blue and clear as they had been when she was a girl, and there was always about her an air of trustworthy confidence, very singular and very moving.

Her children worshipped her. Almost before they could speak, she taught them to sing hymns, her own delicate untrained voice lingering lovingly on the words, as though they were of great personal value to her, as indeed they were. The boys showed much diversity of character, though not one of them had the obstinacy which was Sarel's chief characteristic. It seemed to Sanni sometimes, that they were much more her children than Sarel's. In all of them she could trace facets of herself, whereas they hardly ever reflected, except in their uniform fair good looks, any hint of Sarel. They were all strong and healthy, too, though their food was of the coarsest, and Sanni thanked God night and

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morning for the comfort which He had given her in them. It seemed to her only just that they should be like her. To Sarel they were merely incidents, but she had suffered for them, and worked for them, and lived for them, hoped and feared for them, prayed and rejoiced for them. With each new birth, she had had the same terror of a dark place, which she knew to be the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and she realised the truth of the Psalmist's reliance upon the rod and staff of the Shepherd. However great that reliance had been, fear had still knocked at her heart, as each time she went down into the Great Shadow, to find new life, and bring it back into the world.

Sanni was sorry to hear of old Mrs. Le Roux's illness. She had understood a little of what her mother-in-law must have felt in her long quarrel with Sarel. She knew what she would have felt, if Adam or David had turned against her, and she longed to bring about a reconciliation, but realised her own impotence. Now that his mother was ill, she thought that Sarel might forget the feud between them, and go and see her ; and this she timidly suggested to him a day or two after the advent of Andries Stastok. Whether her moment had been badly chosen, or whether Sarel had had the same idea and was furious that Sanni should broach it before he had decided to do so himself, she never knew. But there had been a violent scene, in the course of which he had reiterated his hatred of his

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mother, and forbidden Sanni, or any of her family, to step over her threshold.

Sanni waited quietly until the storm was over, and turned to God, her continual refuge; but her prayers did not seem as helpful as usual, and she lay awake a long time after Sarel had gone to sleep, thinking about Mrs. Le Roux and Hetty. She knew Sarel would not let her go to Hetty's wedding, and for a moment she resented his brutal interference with her life. But she had long ago learnt to stifle resentment, and realising that the duty of a wife is to obey her husband, without question and without comment, she accepted his attitude.

But he had not told her not to *think* about Hetty, and she wondered what her daughter was like. She had seen the girl, though not for over a year, and had thought her very pretty and graceful. She took after her grandmother, and was tall and slender, with a delicate fair skin, which made her dark hair and eyes even blacker by contrast. She had not much colour, but her pallor looked exotic, rather than unhealthy, and every movement of her body indicated strength. She was not in the least like Sarel, or like her mother, and Sanni realised that all she had done with regard to Hetty, was to bring into the world the daughter her mother-in-law had never had. Sanni herself still longed passionately for a daughter. However tender her sons were to her, their ministrations, physical and spiritual, were rough and uncouth. All her married life she

had prayed for a daughter, and with each new baby she had experienced the same sense of bitter disappointment. Sarel had been delighted with his sons. He had no ideas about their future, but it was better to produce a man-child than a girl-child. It seemed to reflect glory on his own manhood, and there was no psychologist then born, who could refute this theory. He taught the boys to ride and shoot straight, and to harden their bodies against heat and cold, and he tried to teach them to steel their hearts against suffering, animal and human, but in this he was not quite successful, and he often thought bitterly that men were less hardy than they had been in his time.

Mrs. Le Roux had managed Hetty's wedding very well, considering that she was bed-ridden, and after the wedding, Andries and Hetty had continued to live with her. The old woman was very fond of Hetty, and very proud of her, for the girl had the same dominant disposition that she herself had bequeathed to Sarel. Fortunately for Hetty's peace of mind, Andries Stastok was a weak man, and was perfectly willing to accept her word as law, loving her so deeply and passionately, that he would neither thwart her nor criticise her actions. Mrs. Le Roux had seen this when she had first encouraged his love-making, and she was happy to think that she had managed well for her granddaughter.

In continual pain, of which she said no word, her thoughts were seldom away from the problem of

Sarel. Constantly she reviewed the position which she had taken up on that dreadful night, before her two sons had gone out of her life together. It was not love for Klaas that had made her interfere between them then. If Klaas had been the Hottentot Solomon, she would have done as she did. Only by the mercy of God had she been in time to prevent fratricide, and save her beloved son from the justice of God and man. If she had stayed her hand, and permitted Sarel to wreak his vengeance on his brother, how would it have served him? And yet, by the very act of saving him from murder, she had thrust him away from her. Bitterly she regretted the thousand opportunities she had neglected, when she might have taught his violent mind control ; when she might have welded that quick spirit to a more generous outlook. Alone in her agony of body, she wrestled with her agony of soul. She had borne Sarel. He was blood of her blood. For nine months she had formed his body, and for more than twice as many years she could have formed his mind. He was not malleable, certainly, but she knew that her strength was greater than his, and that she could have turned him to whichever of her purposes she desired. A terrible sense of responsibility weighed her down, and she did not know where to turn for help ; for she wished to conceal to her very death-bed the fact that she was in pain either of mind or of body. For six months before she had taken to her bed, she had been racked

with an internal torment, constantly sapping her strength, and draining the blood from her face till her very lips were white. Her skin, always sallow, became like old parchment, and two deep lines furrowed her cheeks from nostril to mouth. Hetty had become terrified of the change in her grandmother, and implored her to see a doctor, but Mrs. Le Roux knew only too well that she was beyond the power of any doctor, and steadfastly refused to let one approach her. As Hetty's wedding drew near, she had gathered up her forces, and determined to live until after that event, and such was her concentration that she seemed to force her lungs to breathe, and her blood to continue flowing, by a rare effort of will. After the wedding she sank rapidly, and knew that she was dying. The pain left her, and with the relaxation of that physical torture, her mental anguish was also relieved. Mrs. Le Roux had made up her mind.

II

SAREL and Sanni were sitting with their family at their midday meal, when Sanni looked through the window and saw a cloud of dust approaching along the road from the town. Realising that it must be a visitor, she placed meat and vegetables and rice upon a plate, and hastily thrust them into the oven to keep warm for the stranger. Sarel left his dinner, and went out to welcome his guest, and Sanni stif-

fened in astonishment as she saw him returning with the Eagle, upon whose stern face, age had apparently not yet set its mark. He greeted her courteously, and shook hands with the children, who hastily finished their dinners and sat staring at him, awed by this majestic apparition. The Eagle wore the customary black frock-coat and trousers which are the only outer clothes ever seen upon a Dutch Reformed clergyman, and looked tired and dusty. He ate his dinner absently, speaking little, and evidently thinking deeply. When he had finished his meal and returned thanks in a lengthy prayer, Sanni dismissed the children, and helped the native girl to clear the table. She then attempted to withdraw from the room, etiquette demanding that she should leave the clergyman alone with her husband, but he requested her to stay, and Sanni gravely sat down on a straight chair near the window, and busied herself with her never-ending patching.

Very quietly the Eagle began to speak to Sarel, not sternly, but patiently, as if he had mellowed a little with the passing of years. Sanni listened to him eagerly, and wondered why she had always been afraid of him. He seemed such a kind old man—not an Eagle at all, just a sympathetic human old man, tired and dusty after a long journey. Sarel listened too, incredulously. Was it possible that the Predikant was telling the truth? Could he really have been ramming his head against a brick wall all

these years? Had his mother really wanted him? Was she dying? She must be very old, about ninety. He and Klaas had been her only children. Klaas had vanished. Her three husbands she had long outlived. What a terrible old age. He could see her alone, in that new house—for to him it was still a new house—with nothing left of all that she might have gathered to herself in more than ninety years of forcible life. She had plenty of money, but what was it worth to her when she wanted love? His eyes strayed to the window, past Sanni, and out across the brown veld to where the white horizon quivered in the sun, as if it had been made of threads of gauze, moving at incredible speed in a loom. The sunlight shone directly into the room, and he could see the dust in it, shaking too as if with life. Outside he heard the ordinary sounds of farm life, daily commonplaces, yet somehow sharper than usual. It was as if his body heard and saw more acutely, because his mind was far away in Verdriet by the bedside of a dying woman, who was his mother. All the love that he had felt for her in the long lonely years they had been parted rushed up into his heart and almost suffocated him. It was as if the Eagle had been Moses, striking upon the rock and causing water to gush therefrom abundantly. But in Sarel it was not the bitter water of Mara, but sweet and clear.

He was aware that the Eagle had asked him a question and was pausing for an answer. He had

not heard the question and looked stupidly at his interlocutor. The Eagle repeated the question: Would Sarel go back with him to his mother's bedside, to receive her dying blessing?

Sarel was unable to speak. He sat with his hands before him on the table staring at the Eagle, his great fair beard rippling over his chest, his big head sitting massively on his shoulders, powerful, arrogant.

The old man leaned forward a little as if trying to drive his words home by sheer physical effort, trying to tear an answer out of Sarel by the very expectancy of his gaze. Sanni, watching them from the window, could not understand Sarel's attitude. She had never seen him like this before. Was he trying to make up his mind to refuse, she wondered? Could he refuse so urgent a request? Folding her hands in her lap, she closed her eyes and prayed. Suddenly Sarel's head fell forward on his arms and he burst into tears, the pitiful tears of a man who has not wept since he left his cradle, caught suddenly in the grip of an emotion too great for him to bear.

Sanni slipped away quietly and busied herself in the kitchen. She sent the smaller children, who clung curiously to her skirts, up to the dam to play, knowing that they would not come back from there until they were fetched. Her three elder sons were busy about the farm. Her servants had gone to their huts by the kraals, and except for the living-

room, she had the house to herself. She could not lie down as she usually did in the afternoon, because she was too excited at what she had just heard and seen, and she moved from room to room quietly and aimlessly, until at last she sat down at the back door, with her Bible in her lap, and opened it at her favourite book, the story of Ruth. Reading the familiar words, she seemed to realise for the first time that she might have been to her mother-in-law what Ruth had been to Naomi. She was very sorry that in her girlhood she had pitted herself against one who might have shown her, easily and in a little time, what she had taken nearly twenty years to learn, by long study and application. A storm was coming up, and she felt as if she were part of it, the ferment of her own thoughts marching with the electricity in the air.

Sarel called her from the living-room and announced shortly that he was going back into town with the Minister, and told her to hold herself in readiness to come if he sent for her. He said nothing of his intentions, and she did not think this strange, for he had never held much conversation with her, and she often understood him without speech. She stood at the front door, and watched them drive away in the Predikant's buggy, to which Sarel had harnessed two of his own horses, for it was a long way into Verdriet, and he felt the need of driving fast. She could see the winding road for several miles and she stood for nearly half an hour leaning

in the frame of the door, till the buggy had topped a little rise, and disappeared on the other side of it. The air had become very oppressive and Sanni knew there would be a thunderstorm that evening. For several nights there had been storms in the surrounding mountains, but hitherto no rain had fallen on the farm. She hoped it would rain, they needed rain so badly. The wretched sheep wandered miserably over the veld, finding little to eat but karoo-bush, so dry and dusty that each sprig of it looked like a mere bundle of sticks. There was some fear of the water giving out, too, though the farm had several fountains on it, and was for that reason exceptionally valuable.

As Sarel had gone away for the night at least, it would not be necessary to cook anything further that day, for the children could have bread and mutton-fat for their supper.

She laid the table for supper, though it was only four o'clock, and then folded her sewing into a parcel, put on her sunbonnet, and made her way up to the dam where her four youngest children were playing contentedly in the shade of the willow-trees. They rushed up to her as she approached them, full of delight, exclaiming that Frans had killed a snake; and when she had inspected the snake, and seen that it was really dead, she settled herself with her back against one of the willows, and taking out her sewing, continued working at the same patch on which she had been employed earlier in the after-

noon. The sky was covered with thick cloud, which had rolled slowly across it, until the sunlight was quite gone except at the edges of the horizon. The heat had become intense, and Sanni longed passionately for the rain which could not now be long delayed. She watched the little boys, who had taken off their shoes of untanned leather and were puddling their bare feet in the mud, which had already been trodden into soft slush by the cows and poultry.

The dam was built across the broad end of a little valley, down which ran a stream from one of the several fountains. It was only a barrier of earth and stones, baked hard with the suns of half a century. The old willow-trees at its edge were cool and green, though it was well on into the summer, and their leaves would soon turn gold and drop off, to be carried away in the wind like little twisting feathers. Sanni loved the willows, whether they were green as now, or yellowed with autumn, or stark in the winter sunshine, their long twigs leaning over to the water as if they were so many lines dropped by invisible fishermen to charm the tadpoles from underneath.

But best of all she loved them in the spring, when each bare withe would put out buds of green, and the whole tree, without yet losing its shape into leaves, would seem soft and delicate, as illusive as though a breath might blow it away for ever. Under the willows at the other side of the dam, several

ducks were sleeping peacefully. It seemed to Sanni very beautiful, in that unnatural grey stillness. Suddenly she wished intensely that Mrs. Le Roux could see it, all of it, the house, the farm, everything. It had been her home for so long, longer even than it had been Sanni's, and she must often have longed for it in those last years. Sanni sighed, and looked up at the sky. There was a flash of lightning, and a peal of thunder almost immediately upon its heels, and she realised that the storm was about to break. Calling the children to put on their shoes, she hurried them home, and had barely reached the shelter of the house before the rain began to fall in torrents.

The Predikant and Sarel were quite near Verdriet when the storm broke over them, and they stopped and put up the hood of the buggy. They had not spoken much during their drive, for Sarel's emotions were too mixed for speech, and the Eagle was not the man to press home an advantage needlessly. It was darker than it usually is at sunset in February, but the sky was so clouded that it seemed later than it was. Sarel was terrified lest he should not be in time to say good-bye to his mother, and the Eagle shared his anxiety, for he knew how desperate was her case. When they got to the edge of the ford, they found that there was a good deal of water in the river. It was dark and brown, and running rather swiftly. They had known that the river was down, long before they reached it, for it made

a roaring noise, like some great animal. It did not look like an animal, but like a maggot, or an obscene worm, twisting its brown length through the stuff of the earth, going from infinity to infinity, a welter of precious water which would mean life to the country it traversed, but which, being beyond control, was useless and lost.

As the river had been quite dry on his outward journey, the Predikant thought that the ford would still be safe, and though they might have left the horses, and crossed by the suspension-bridge near the location, to adopt such a measure would mean wasting more than half an hour. Sarel was in no mood to contemplate such a waste of time with equanimity, and he needed no urging to drive the horses down the steep side of the drift and into the river. It was not long before he regretted this step, for the current was swifter than he had anticipated, and the river had brought down a great many stones, which might easily injure the horses' legs. However, it was too late to turn back, and the water was rising higher every moment. Opening his clasp-knife, he slipped it into his coat pocket in case of need, and called to the Predikant to be ready to jump if the buggy should overturn. He had to shout at the top of his voice to make himself heard at all above the roar of the water. Stones were pounding against the wheels of the cart, which continued to rock horribly. Both men realised that they were in terrible danger, for the evening was

gradually growing darker, and if they were once washed away from the cart and horses, no power on earth could save them from drowning, for they would be battered into insensibility in a few moments.

They were not more than half-way across when Sarel saw plainly that they would never be able to make the opposite bank. The ascent on the town side was not steep, but by now the horses were swimming, and if the cart overturned everything would be lost. Giving the reins to the Predikant, he took his clasp-knife in his hand, and climbed on to the seat behind the Eagle so as to change places with him. They were both very big men and the change of position was fraught with dreadful danger. Standing on the step of the buggy, half his body in water, Sarel, risking the kicks of the horse, made his way to its head and cut it loose from the central shaft. He then felt his way back to the traces and called to the Predikant to jump as he cut them. The freed horse, with Sarel clinging to its neck with his right arm, and supporting the Predikant with his left, struggled away from the buggy and the other horse. These were promptly torn away from the road, overturned in the race of water, and swept out of sight.

Many of the townspeople had gathered by the side of the river and were watching the struggle. Sarel felt that his arms were being torn from their sockets. Buffeted by the water, he maintained his

grasp of the Eagle. Neither of them could swim, so if the horse were drowned, or if they lost their grip of it, they would be without hope. The world seemed to reel about Sarel, sky was water and water was sky. He felt himself being sucked under—he was suffocating—there was a loud noise in his head—he must not let go—above everything he must not let go.

III

SAREL sat by his mother's bed, feeling acutely uncomfortable. Eager hands had dragged him from the water. Well-intentioned neighbours had dried him and clothed him and fed him, and someone had driven him to his mother's house. His was not a nature which accepts kindness graciously, and he felt foolish and ill-at-ease under these ministrations. He had been horrified at seeing his mother, so mask-like and remote, lying wrapped in red flannel on her ugly brass bed. She was so weak that at first she could hardly speak to him, as he bent over her and touched the claw-like hand that lay on the patchwork of the quilt. She seemed shrunken and lost in the unfriendly light of the paraffin lamp and its tin reflector. With a great effort she rallied her forces, and lifting one claw she laid it heavily on his bent head, blessing him. She had no need to forgive him, for against him she had never had any personal spite. Her love for him had been the

strongest force in her life, and though misdirected, it had always been unselfish. After a moment, her hand fell limply back on to the bed, withered and shrivelled like a vine-leaf in autumn, a light thing, purposeless, and without direction.

Sarel sat upright and looked at the familiar features. Heavy lids lay over the sunken black eyes, under the still dark eyebrows that jutted ferociously. Almost they met across the thin bridge of the delicate nose. Faint blue veins threaded her temples, and innumerable wrinkles made a pattern as of tapestry across the bisque surface of her face. Her night-cap was frilled and goffered, exquisitely laundered ; and its transparent whiteness seemed like porcelain. She looked incredibly old, almost mummified. Her slight breathing did not stir the flannel of her wrap. She would die very soon. Already her feet were set upon a road that, to her, was no darker than the roadway upon which she had already been walking for so long. She was not afraid to die, she was not sorry to die, she was not glad to die. She knew that she was about to meet God. A moment would come when the thread of her life would break, and the next moment she would stand before her Judge, in Whom there was no scruple of injustice, no pity, and no rancour. She had built up her God in her own image, the embodiment of stern justice, and she was certain that from Him there was no escape. She knew that her life had been sinless. She had kept the com-

mandments rigidly, and would sit in everlasting glory, watching the damned, who had broken those elementary precepts, burning and twisting in eternal flame, unable to think of anything but the cup of cold water that was denied them.

What thoughts Sarel was able to draw clearly from the confusion in his mind were not encouraging. Death appalled him. Its grotesque majesty made him feel insignificant, and this he resented. He was fifty years old, and had already lived through so much. He would live another forty, possibly longer, and yet the end, when it came, would be the same. Hetty had forgotten to shut the shutters across the window, and outside he could see a casuarina tree, bowing bizarrely under its weeping blue-green hair. It looked grey where the light from the window caught it, grey and shining, still wet from the rain which had now stopped. His eyes wandered back into the room. He noticed the varnished yellow furniture, and the ugly wall-paper, but they conveyed nothing to him. His mind could not turn away from the central figure of death. Death seemed to be standing by the dying woman, deliberately withholding his hand, and giving her a few more moments of life. For what? To all intents and purposes she was already dead. Her life was over. Events for her had ceased to move. Sarel watched, fascinated, the throbbing of a small pulse in her temple. It was slow, like the ticking of a clock whose winding is

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overdue. She was in no pain. She had no thoughts, no desires, no energies, no ambitions. She had seen her son, and blessed him. Soon she would see her Father in Heaven, Who in His turn would bless her, and with as little demonstration.

Outside in the living-room, Hetty and Andries waited with the Eagle. In a moment they would come in, and Sarel's last private interview with his mother would be over. He wished they would come, but could not be unfilial enough to call them, unless there were a definite change in her condition. He disliked the lamp. Candle light would have been moving, soft. This light was harsh with careless unwinking brightness, that cut the shadows with clean edges like silhouettes, instead of painting them with drifting curves, as candles would have done even in that still air. It was cooler after the rain, and outside the water ran turbid in the furrows, and the smell of soft dust was rising above the houses, delicate and fragrant. Inside it smelt only of cleanliness, a hard soapy smell that Sarel had always connected with his mother.

Suddenly, as if Death, as a final gift before his still more final annihilation, gave back a handful of life to his victim, Mrs. Le Roux sat up in bed and opened her eyes. Sarel was terrified by her action. She had appeared so corpse-like that movement in her had seemed an impossibility. Again she laid her claw-like hand upon him, and again she tried to speak. Her mouth opened, and at first no sound

issued from it, but then suddenly and quite clearly the words came.

‘ My darling son,’ she said, and fell back dead among her pillows.

This final movement broke Sarel completely. He slipped from the chair on to his knees beside the bed, and buried his head in the patchwork quilt. He was no longer a strong man with his hand always against the world, he was no longer a dynamic spirit set against another like itself, he was no longer six and a half feet of virile humanity, father of seven sons, and respected and feared by everyone with whom he came into contact, he was no longer any of these. In that one moment they were all stripped from him, and he was nothing but a little child crying for his mother. The majesty of Death had departed with Death, and upon the bed lay only the corpse of a tall shrunken old woman, who had gathered little in her life, and like the rest of the world gone out of it with nothing at all.

At the sound of Sarel’s sobbing, the others had come rushing into the room, replacing the stillness with a turmoil of movement. Soon—he did not know how soon—Sarel found himself back in the living-room, with the Eagle and Andries ; while Hetty and a neighbour’s wife busied themselves with the body. The Eagle was talking, and Andries was talking, but Sarel sat silent between them quite unable to grasp a word of what they said. What did it matter *what* they said ? Why should he

answer them, listen to them? There was nothing they could say now which would make any difference, nothing that would give him back the best years of his life, nothing that would restore to him his mother. He was vividly conscious of her love and her pride in him, he was aware for the first time of the full measure of his own love for her. It stunned him to realise he was capable of so much feeling. It seemed unmanly, almost indecent, to love like this. He tried desperately to pull himself together, and listen to the Eagle, but it was no use. With a muttered word of apology he got up and went out into the garden. The rain had refreshed the rose-trees and had raised a thousand scents from the damp earth. Overhead, the sky was thick with stars, not the piercing blue stars of winter, like swords of steel, cutting across the arching night, but little silver stars, set close together in a cloudy vapour of light. He sat down on a bench on the back stoep, and let his mind wander back to the days when he and his mother had found so much pleasure in living side by side. He forgot her faults as deliberately as in all these years he had forgotten her virtues; as if death had wiped out one side of her character, and unveiled another. The dark outline of the wall loomed across the garden, devilishly insisting on much that he desired to forget. In his own house on the other side of the wall there were strangers, and now and then between the opening and shutting of a door, he heard the tinkle of the

piano that he had bought for Sanni, just after he had quarrelled with his mother. The thought of strangers in his own house filled him with disgust. He would turn them out to-morrow ; or if not to-morrow then as soon as might be. He would live there himself. He would pull down that wall and make the gravel path again, and in the evening he would come across as he used to do and talk to his mother. God! his mother was dead! He would never talk to her again. The realisation that she was dead stunned him afresh. He twisted his thoughts back from the past to the present, and tried to think about the funeral the next day. It was impossible. The idea of a funeral conveyed to him nothing but his father's funeral, from which etiquette had demanded that his mother should be excluded, for women did not attend funerals. It seemed long ago, and *was* long ago, more than thirty years ago. Its outlines were blurred, and he could not grasp them.

Inside the house, the Eagle had said good-night to Hetty and her husband, and had gone home. He was a powerful old man, but even his strength had been tried by the events of the day, and he felt tired and dispirited. After the door had closed behind him, and as he walked along the cool streets to his own house, he thought of the people in whose lives so great a difference had so suddenly been made. He thought of the dead, and he thought of the living. He wondered what the future would

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bring forth, seen by the light of the past. He himself had changed much, he thought, since he was Sarel's age. Perhaps this would be the turning-point in that wayward life. Perhaps now that violent temper would be bridled, that strength controlled. He thought of Sanni. He thought of Hetty and Andries. No future seemed very clear for any of them. He felt perplexed, as though his flock had become too difficult for his guiding hand. Was he getting old? He certainly felt old, but many men did good work for years, long after they were past his age. He shook his head doubtfully as he entered his own door, and that night prayed for a long time before he went to bed.

Sanni came into Verdriet the next morning, and stayed with Hetty. They sat together when the men went to the funeral, in the darkened parlour which was so seldom used, and which smelt stuffy, as though the window were never opened. Sanni did not know what to say to Hetty. She felt shy and awkward, as if she were in the presence of a stranger. It did not seem to her that Hetty was her daughter at all, but a strange modern competent woman of the world, who made her feel like a country bumpkin. Hetty had improved a great deal in looks since her marriage, and was certainly the best-looking woman Sanni had ever seen. She noticed her mother's embarrassment, but made no effort to alleviate it. She was thoroughly self-possessed, and felt no ties of blood or affection binding

her to this stumpy little woman, whom, in fact she rather disliked. The death of her grandmother had not come as a shock to her, and her sentiments towards her had never been particularly warm. Although she adopted a suitable demeanour of grief, she felt no real sorrow, but rather relief, as if she had laid aside a tiresome burden. She knew that her grandmother had left her a good deal of money, and she appreciated this, for she was ambitious and calculating, and did not intend to remain in Verdriet all her life. She had decided that Andries should go in for politics, and as he was clever as well as amenable, she was certain of his success.

After several unsuccessful conversational openings, Sanni relapsed into silence. It was too dark in the parlour to sew, and indeed to do so during the funeral would have been a frightful breach of convention, so that she could not use her hands, but had to sit folding them idly on her lap, painfully comparing their work-worn appearance with those of Hetty, which were slender and shapely, like her father's, and with the same beautiful nails, which had presumably never done any rough work at all. Hetty was accustomed to sitting still and being a lady of leisure. It was no hardship to her to sit still and think, for she had her future to plan and work out in detail, and this she enjoyed doing, sitting placidly elegant and beautiful, without movement, withdrawn into herself. Sanni could not sit still like

this. She fidgeted her hands restlessly. She could not place her feet comfortably on the floor, for her chair was too high, and Hetty had not offered her a footstool. She was unhappy too, for her heart ached for Sarel's misery, and she felt keenly that she could do little or nothing to help him. The attitude of her daughter, too, distressed her beyond measure, and she realised that it was her own fault. She had given her child away when it was born, and now it was too late to hope to recall the gift. All the long years she had longed for a daughter seemed to stretch behind her, like the dark pages of some dreadful book, empty and lonely, written in a language she had learned painfully to read. Ahead of her stretched the future, as dark and lonely as the past, traced with cabalistic characters, at whose meaning she could not yet guess ; and here in the same room with her sat the daughter to whom she had given life, with no hint of sympathy for the past, or help for the future, merely a dispassionate stranger, watching without interest.

In Hetty Sanni could trace a marked physical resemblance to old Mrs. Le Roux, but the younger woman had no vestige of her grandmother's interest in human life. Aloof, disdainful, she moved among the people of Verdriet, her chief resemblance to her family being that curious inability to make friends, which Sanni had so often deplored in Sarel. Sanni herself was a very friendly creature, and had she had the time, and been less shy, she might have

liked her life in the town, but as it was, she infinitely preferred the farm. She thought about the farm as she sat there in the dark with Hetty, and longed for its friendliness and its homely atmosphere. She hoped the little children were all right. The three eldest she had brought with her, and they were now at the graveside with their father, watching a grandmother, of whom they knew practically nothing, being delivered into the dark clutches of the soil. The farm was a comfort to Sanni. She could think of it, and ignore Hetty, so she deliberately fixed her mind upon it, turning away from Verdriet and all that it represented, clinging passionately to familiar things, wrapping herself round them, forcing her consciousness away from everything else, until at last there stole over her her customary mood of resigned happiness, and her face lost its worried lines, and regained its unclouded serenity.

BOOK

IV



BOOK IV

IT was a great blow to Sanni when Sarel announced his intention of coming back to live in Verdriet and reopening his office. Not only did she dislike the thought of leaving the farm, but she dreaded returning to the house where she had passed so many turbulent years in her early married life. She would not admit, even to herself, that she disliked the thought of living near Hetty as much as she had formerly disliked the thought of living near Mrs. Le Roux. It was ridiculous and childish to be afraid of one's own daughter. But Sanni *was* afraid of Hetty, as the dove fears the serpent, sensing in her a spiritual quality foreign to her own. Another disadvantage, from Sanni's point of view, was that her family would have to be divided ; for Adam and David were to remain at the farm. Adam was to be married at the end of the year to one of the teachers at the local school, and David was going to build himself a house a mile or so away, to which, when it was finished, he would no doubt also take a bride. Sanni was not the mother to be distressed at her son's marriage. She loved Adam dearly, and liked the little girl to whom he was engaged. She knew his faults and his virtues, and she considered that he

would make an ideal husband to almost any woman. Nor did she doubt David, but she feared that the two brothers' continuous companionship would lead to a certain amount of friction between their wives, should these young women not care for one another. Adam and David were constantly together, as is often the case with twins, and though they would seldom speak to one another, each seemed aware of the other's feelings and ideas.

However, it is not the duty of a wife to argue with her husband when he decides upon a line of conduct, so Sanni packed her few belongings, and brought her five younger sons into the town, and soon appeared as settled as if her twenty years on the farm had been only as many days. She was bound to admit that in one way the move was a good one, for the children could receive a better education than she could otherwise have given them. Frans, at twelve years old, was already showing signs of being fond of reading, and deep in her heart Sanni formed the hope that one day he might enter the Church.

It was a great blow to her, that very soon after they had moved back into Verdriet, the Eagle accepted a call to some far-away district, and his place was filled by a younger man.

Sarel had taken to going to church again, since at the eleventh hour the breach between him and his mother had been healed and there was no longer any reason for his exclusion from the Communion.

With what pride Sanni accompanied him in her black silk dress on Sundays, following him as he walked up the aisle, tall and handsome, and followed in her turn by her five stalwart sons, of whom all but the two youngest were already taller than she was. With what pride she bowed her thankful head in prayer, to the just and merciful God Who had given her so much to be grateful for. Looking round the church, she missed many familiar faces, and always felt a sickening sensation of loss, as she saw the pew so long occupied by her mother-in-law, now seating only Andries and Hetty Stastok.

Hetty was about to become a mother, but she did not welcome any remarks on the subject, and asked for no advice. Sanni marvelled at her cool self-possession, and after one or two tentative but well-meant efforts, which Hetty coldly snubbed, made no further reference to the fact. The women did not often meet, for Sanni's family was too large to admit of much leisure, and it was not in Hetty's nature to run in familiarly, even into the house of her own parents. At this time Sanni discovered too, with incredulous horror, that she was again pregnant. Her youngest child was seven years old, and she had considered that her period of fertility was over. At first she hoped that her physical condition was indeed the approach of an early sterility, but soon she realised that this was not the case. Sarel was delighted when she told him the news, and hoped for an eighth son. On each previous occasion, Sanni

had wished for a daughter, but this time she was not sure. The word daughter was becoming synonymous with the word Hetty, and she feared that she might not know how to bring up a girl. She had been so successful with her sons. They were so beautiful and good and healthy. She was nervous, too, that the newcomer might be a weakling, but Sarel laughed this idea to scorn, and pointed out that he himself had been born when his mother was over forty.

The year passed into July, and the nights became bitterly cold. In the Karoo winter is a time of bright sunshine, followed at night by hard frost. Sometimes there is snow, but seldom, and when there is, it stays a long time on the ground, stiffening at night where it has thawed in the day-time. The sky seems far above the earth and is an intense dark blue at night, shot with stars of steely brightness. During the day red dust-devils whirl across the veld, rising suddenly out of nothing, and towering in a thin spiral twenty feet into the air, and then as suddenly falling flat again, to the dust from which they sprang.

It had been in July that Klaas had made his last unexpected return to Verdriet, and Sanni remembered how cold it had been, when old Mrs. Le Roux had come to wake Sarel and talk over the return of the wanderer. That had not been the last winter she had spent in town, but it had always stood out in her mind as a type with which to compare suc-

ceeding winters. This one she thought was like it, as cold and monotonous. It was very windy, too, and although the shutters were shut in the daytime for several hours, while the sun was at its brightest, and although the house was dusted twice every day, you could hardly lay your hand upon the polished wood of chair or table without feeling under your fingers a thick layer of reddish grit. And as, in that other July, a summons for help had come from the new house to the old, so in this July was there a knocking in the middle of the night, though this time it was at the front door.

Sarel got up to see what the trouble was, and Sanni watched him apprehensively as he went through the dark doorway into the passage, taking the candle with him. She heard a sound of voices. All the light gathered at the door. It seemed to refuse to enter the room, so heavy was the darkness. The light shook in the passage and looked milky, like water in a bottle that has held eau-de-Cologne. Sanni's ears strained to hear the voices, but they were low and anxious, and beyond the fact that it was a man's voice speaking, she could gather nothing. A minute passed like an hour and Sarel came back into the room.

'It's Hetty,' he announced briefly, 'and they can't get the doctor. You'd better go and see what you can do.'

Sanni dressed quickly, her teeth chattering with cold and her fingers numb. Hurriedly she twisted

the braids of hair at the back of her head, and secured them with stout pins. She wrapped herself in her coat and went to the door, where Andries was waiting for her. He had refused to come in and was trembling with nervousness. Taking her by the arm, he rushed her round the corner of the street, and into his own house, where, as usual, there were no servants, for not even old Sophie slept in the house. Andries explained that he had been to call the doctor, but he was out of town, attending to a similar event on a farm fifteen miles distant. Hetty had not expected her baby for another fortnight, and was now huddled in the bed in which her grandmother had died, her limbs knotted with pain, and her face bloodless. Telling Andries to light a fire and boil a kettle, Sanni did what she could for her daughter's comfort, and then knelt down beside the bed and began to pray. There was nothing else that she could do at this stage of the proceedings, and as always, in any emergency, her mind turned to God. With Him she felt on equal terms. He was not only her God, her Creator, her Master, He was also her Confidant and her Friend. To Him she took all her troubles, and asked His advice about them, simply and plainly, using no language more elaborate than that in which she spoke to her children. Hetty watched her from the bed amazed. She felt deserted and helpless. She had never thought it would be like this. Everybody had babies, without much fuss or bother. The doc-

tor had assured her that she would be perfectly well and need anticipate no trouble. Where was the doctor? Where was Andries? Why didn't her mother *do* something, instead of kneeling there gabbling like a parrot? This wasn't the time for praying. What was the good of praying to a God who let things like this happen to women? She hadn't wanted a baby, but God had sent it. It was no use praying to Him *now*. That wasn't going to help matters. Pain for a moment swung her into space, and she felt as if she had been lashed with a huge whip, which had caught her in its end, and sent her flying out over the world, until she recoiled in agony, gasping upon her bed. A cry rose to her lips, but she bit it back, fighting for self-control. Again and again the whip-lash seemed to strike her, until she was almost frenzied with pain. A faint moan came from her, and then another, until her resistance broke down, and she shook with hysteria.

Sanni rose from her knees. She did not feel strengthened, as she usually did by prayer. Hetty interfered, somehow, between her and God. Hetty was a type of the World, faithless and striving. She called Andries, and sent him to fetch the woman who had been with her on the night when her last twins were born. She herself did not realise quite what was the matter with Hetty, and she could do nothing to help her. Her neighbour's wider experience might suggest some form of relief. Hetty was no longer capable of coherent thought. Form and

colour and sound seemed mingled into a chaotic whirl about her, a medley of noise and movement, indistinguishable from one another. Hour after hour passed, tearing over her head like maelstroms of darkness, though in reality, the moments were crawling slowly by. Andries returned with the midwife, whose efforts were as futile as had been those of Sanni. The only difference that her coming made was that Sanni's nerves relaxed slightly now that the responsibility was not hers alone. A candle burnt down into its socket, and guttered. Another was lit, and this too shortened. The women on either side of the bed looked at each other anxiously, and shook their heads. Occasionally Sanni tried to turn to the relief of prayer, but she knew, as her lips framed the words, that they were empty of significance. Through the chinks of the shutters, the dawn peered in curiously. Outside, cocks crowed, and down one of the streets an ox-waggon creaked noisily. And still the doctor did not come.

At about seven o'clock he arrived, worn out and dispirited after a sleepless night. Sanni left the bedroom and went into the kitchen, where Sophie and the other servants were chattering nervously. She hushed them, and set them about their work, and cooked breakfast for Andries, who sat, a patient ghost, looking out into the garden with unseeing eyes. Then she went home and tidied herself, and set her own servants about their work. She packed the children off to school, and Sarel to

his office, and then went back to the house where she was only too sure Hetty was still fighting a losing battle.

It was not until eight o'clock that night that she was able to go to the waiting husband, and tell him that he was the father of a son. She told him also, that Hetty's proud spirit had broken the bonds which tied it to her beautiful body, and had gone out, crying into the night, to its own place. What there was to be done, she did, for Andries was in no mood to attend to anything. Sarel made the arrangements for Hetty's funeral, and Sanni procured a wet-nurse for the baby, which thrived lustily. There was no more to be done. Sanni felt acutely that her first grandchild was no more to her than any casual baby that she passed in the street. She had liked her son-in-law, and would have welcomed him to her house, but Hetty had resisted any intimacy when she was alive, and now that she was dead it was impossible. When six months later Andries Stastok re-married, and moved out of Verdriet, Sanni did not even notice that he had gone, for at that time she was seriously worried about her own baby, who was, as she had feared, very delicate. It cried almost continuously in the first weeks of its existence, and had convulsions which terrified Sanni, whose earlier babies had sailed serenely into life, free from any difficulties whatever.

Paul to a certain extent outgrew his weakness

when he was weaned, which was earlier than Sanni desired, for in nursing her children she found a physical satisfaction, quite different from anything else she had ever experienced. She thought, as she nursed them, that there was nothing in the world more beautiful than to be able to give another human being frame, and substance, and life itself, and then to sustain with your own body, the life you had created. She had forgotten, in the seven years which had passed since she had suckled her last son, what a wonderful thing it was to have a baby at one's breast, and joy and peace surged up in her, until she turned, as always, in gratitude to an all-merciful Providence. Looking at Paul as he lay in her arms, his small hairless head pressed closely against the white skin of her breast, she thought him lovely, though he was in reality a poor creature, and not one tenth as handsome or as fine a child as any of his brothers.

Sarel was pleased at the birth of his son, but he too had forgotten, in the seven years which lay between Henry and Paul, what it was like to sleep in the same room with a new-born infant. The idea of a husband sleeping in a different room from his wife, or even in a separate bed, was entirely unheard-of, except in sickness, so he made no effort to move out of the front bedroom where he still lay nightly by Sanni's side, in the black iron bed with its feather mattress. After a while he learnt to sleep, even through Paul's most penetrating cries,

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and snored peacefully as Sanni paced the floor for hours, trying to hush Paul's peevish wailing, so that he might not interfere with his father's rest.

II

THE coming of Judith was a complete surprise to everybody in Verdriet. Klaas Le Roux had been entirely forgotten, except as the cause of Sarel's epic quarrel with his mother, and when one day a strange native came into the town on foot, carrying a white baby on his back, with a parcel and a letter addressed to Sanni, his arrival occasioned a tremendous sensation.

Sarel was in his office when he received the news, which he did from half a dozen neighbours, who converged simultaneously upon the place, each eager to be the first with the tidings. He was not so violent as he used to be, but still, quite violent enough to make it slightly dangerous to thwart or bait him. On this occasion everybody expected a frenzied outburst, but in this they were disappointed. Sarel merely put on his hat, and walked across the square to his house, without making any response to their information.

He opened the door and strode heavily down the passage to the back stoep, where he found Sanni sitting with a strange child on her lap, questioning a native who stood respectfully before her. On Sarel's approach she ceased questioning the boy,

as it was not becoming for her to do so when he was there to perform that office. Sarel sat down and subjected the native to a gruelling fire of cross-questioning. He was Mr. Klaas Le Roux's boy. He had come from a long way. The place he came from had no name. His Baas had lived in an ox-waggon with his missis, and the baby-missis. His missis had died of black sickness and he and his Baas had buried her under a thorn-tree. Then his Baas had got the sickness, and his Baas had told him where to come. It was a great many days away. He was to wait until his Baas was dead and then to take the baby-missis, and the white stone, and the book, and the letter, and to bring them to Verdriet to Mrs. Le Roux. He knew no more. He had come many days' march, as they could see by his feet. He was an old man, though he would still be referred to as a boy, as are all South African natives. He looked very ill and tired. The child was filthy, and dressed in the most dreadful rags. The white stone was a clear cube, like glass, about as big as a marble, tied in a small cotton bag. The Bible was undoubtedly the one which Klaas's mother had given him before he had originally left Verdriet, and the letter was also undoubtedly from him.

'This is my daughter Judith,' it ran, 'I did you a great wrong, and cannot atone for it. I have no one else who will take care of the child. The stone is a diamond from the Vaal River, and should provide her with a dowry when she marries. Her

mother is dead, and I shall soon be dead also. Forgive me, Sanni.'

Klaas had written the letter with a burnt stick on a fly-leaf torn from some book. It was a ragged enough scrap, but undoubtedly genuine. Of the genuineness of Judith there could be no doubt, for in spite of her rags and filth, she was the image of Sarel, and could be nothing but a Le Roux. Sarel dismissed the native, and told old Solomon the Hottentot to see that he had food and water, then he pulled his pipe from his pocket and lit it thoughtfully.

During all this Sanni had not said a word, and Judith had remained silent and contented. She was about two years old, Sanni judged, and strong and healthy. Sarel remained for a long time in a state of contemplation. He watched the smoke as it left his lips in clouds and curled up to the vine above his head, now bare of leaves, making a gnarled tracery of brown against the blue of the sky beyond it. The sunlight came through and fell in broad yellow patches on the uneven stone of the stoep, and the shadow of the vine lay purple between the patches of sun. Sanni stole a look at her husband's face. It did not look angry, but sad. Judith shifted slightly on her lap, and, laying her head on Sanni's shoulder, went to sleep. The afternoon wore on. Sarel was thinking of his mother, thinking of that pale face which he had last seen lying in its coffin, surrounded with the hideous upholstery demanded

by the dead. The shadows grew paler as the air darkened. Sanni dared not break the silence, for she knew how easily a word might sway her husband into some decision which he might repent, but would never rescind. In an agony she waited.

At last he rose, knocked out his pipe against his boot, blew through it to clear it, and looked down at the sleeping child in his wife's arms. 'She stays,' he said briefly, 'if you will take care of her,' and before Sanni had time to answer him, he walked through the house and over to his office again.

Verdriet accepted Judith as it accepted everything else. People stared and whispered, whispered and stared. But they soon got tired of doing either, when apparently nobody noticed whether they did it or not, and within a year or two they had almost forgotten that she was not Sanni's own child. Sanni was enchanted with Judith, for the child clung to her, and showed no affection for anyone else. She could talk a little, though only English, but Sanni could talk English well, though since she had married the language used in her home had been Dutch. And all the boys learnt English at school, and were able to talk to Judith, so that gradually the Le Roux household spoke as much English as it did Dutch. Going to school as they did and mixing with other children, which they had of course never done on the farm, the boys made friends with a great many English-speaking children, and Sanni found that the whole village was becoming Angli-

cised. There was even an English church, a small pitiful affair compared to the Dutch Reformed Church, but with quite a nice-looking clergyman, and a small but regular congregation. There were some Wesleyans in the town, too, who held meetings of a peculiar nature in a barn-like building next to Sarel's office, but Sanni did not know any of them socially, and consequently took no interest in what they did.

Looking back in after years, Sanni thought that the five or six years before the Boer War were the happiest in her life. Her two eldest sons were married and had small but increasing families. Their wives liked her, and often came into the town to visit her. Her third son, Willem, was a clerk in the bank, and though she lived in daily dread that he would be moved to some other centre, he had not yet left home. Frans, the fourth, had lived up to the promise of his early youth, and having passed the magic-sounding examinations called Elementary, School Higher, and Matriculation, had become a teacher in the school. He was of slighter build than his brothers and was a great dandy, wearing a Panama hat in the summer, and, whenever the drought had left one in the garden, a flower in his buttonhole. Sarel, her fifth son, called after his father, had shown such brilliance at school, that he had been sent to Edinburgh to become a doctor, and Sanni's heart glowed with pride when she received his letters. Pieter, Henry and Paul were

still at school and Judith was rapidly approaching the time when she, too, would have to enter those awe-inspiring portals. Altogether, regarding her family collectively, Sanni was convinced that in the length and breadth of the Cape Colony, there was no woman more abundantly blessed than she was. Even about Sarel she had less anxiety than formerly. Since his mother's death his temper had become much more controlled and he had settled down into flamboyant middle age. His fair hair and beard were streaked with grey, but there was no hint of bowing in the broad shoulders, and no diminution of strength in the massive limbs.

Sarel was as content as Sanni with the way in which his life had settled down. It was like a river, twisted and tortuous in its beginning, with swift rapids and deceptive currents, which swung one hither and thither like a straw in the water, leading to unknown whirlpools and submerged rocks, but which at last broadened out into a placid lake, where the sun bathed itself from dawn to sunset, and where hardly a wind rippled along the surface. He was prouder even than Sanni of his sons, for as she regarded them as more hers than his, so he regarded them as more his than hers. They were the sons of his loins and he had worked for their nourishment, toiling on his farm or in his office to pay for their daily bread and education. He had brought them up, and made men of them, correcting them wisely, and pointing out to them the

many pitfalls which beset all human beings, by the will of God, but which can nevertheless, by the exercise of a little shrewdness, be circumvented. He was immensely proud of his grandchildren also, and complimented his daughters-in-law, whenever he saw them, upon being excellent mothers, never failing to inquire even at christenings, when they were going to present him with another grandchild. Judith he spoilt terribly, and although she was only about six years old the child knew already that she could twist him round her little finger. She would climb all over him, being always sure of her welcome, and, tugging at his great beard, demand to dance on his foot, or be thrown up into the air and be caught again in his arms. He carved her dolls out of pieces of firewood, and a miniature ox-waggon and team of oxen, with a grotesque pot-bellied little Kaffir as leader. He picked her bunches of grapes from the trellis above the back stoep, when she had been strictly forbidden to eat grapes, and laughed when Sanni scolded them both. He took her riding in front of him on his big white mare, and promised her that as soon as she was big enough, she should have a pony of her own, a cream and white piebald Shetland pony with a long tail that swept the ground, exactly like the one that the fairy had ridden in the travelling circus that had visited Verdriet in the summer.

All the boys adored Judith too, and played with her and spoilt her, until Sanni said that between

them they would be the ruin of her, but they only laughed like their father, and spoilt her the more. Paul in particular, admired Judith, for he was the weakest of the family, and had the weakling's passionate admiration for strength. He loved her curly hair and her strong little legs, and even her red mouth with its pitiful six-year-old paucity of teeth. Ignoring the gibes of his brothers, he would play house with her for hours together, and shoot Kaffirs from the laager which they made behind the toy ox-waggon, and he promised that when they grew up, he would be a pioneer, and that she should marry him, and be a pioneer too, and load all the rifles. And Judith triumphed in her conquest, and grew puffed-up and vain, until the other women in Verdriet told Sanni that she was spoiling the child. But Sanni smiled gently at them, and continued to spoil Judith, whom she loved with a sevenfold love.

The golden days passed on, year following year, and the Le Roux family prospered, until it seemed that the coming of Judith had been like some divine blessing, like Hope, issuing from Pandora's Box of Gifts. There was nothing to mar that time of prosperity, no cloud to dim its mirror surface of calm. Thinking, as Sanni often did, of her past, she became more and more convinced in the Truth of the Bible. It was still her only book, and she read and re-read it, twisting every text to the confirmation of her own idea that the Blessing of God fell upon the Just, and upon the Unjust were showered down

Destruction and Desolation. And then, so far away that not even the wisest could see it, came a cloud.

III

THE end of the nineteenth century was not a happy time for South Africa. Historians will try and sift the truth from the million lies that have been told about the Boer War, for the last thirty years, and eventually they may succeed in doing so. To-day the rights and wrongs of that struggle are still agitating an entire nation, and undying feuds still hinge upon trivial matters connected with it. For more than a generation it has lived in the heart of every Boer in the country, and though sometimes, for a moment, it has hidden its head, a word has always been enough to bring it back into vibrant life.

To the people of Verdriet, the war came as a complete surprise. Up to that time English and Dutch had lived together amicably. They had not had a great deal of intercourse with one another, because of differences of language and point of view, but they were both Whites in a country filled with Blacks, and that common interest had kept them together in spite of a frequent lack of understanding. Among certain families there had been friendship. There had even been intermarriage. In many houses, as in the Le Roux house, certain

members could speak little English, and others little Dutch, and they communicated with one another in a mixture of the two languages, ugly to listen to, but extremely expressive. Sometimes new words were coined, half Dutch, half English, and until the outbreak of war there was every reason to suppose that the two nations would be able to weld themselves into a common People. Their racial differences were negligible. Both were Northern in origin, both had successfully combined before, both had the same inherent love of freedom, the same industry and application. Physically they were of the same type, and in their minor qualities so complementary that a real fusion of the two should have been ideal. Had it not been for the unfortunate discovery of gold and diamonds, South Africa might have remained a peaceful agricultural country, too small in population to have mattered to anyone else in the world, too far away for progress to have laid threatening fingers upon its happiness, until such a fusion had become an accomplished fact. But it was not to be; and on the verge of the twentieth century there broke out a war which has made the spiritual union of Dutch and English people in South Africa a mockery and a farce.

It was Sarel that first told Sanni of the war. Verdriet had gone ahead a great deal in the 1890's, and now boasted a Village Management Board, a railway station, and a bi-weekly newspaper. But it

was not the newspaper that had brought Sarel the news, nor had it come by train. Even the telegraph had not brought it, so far as anyone could trace the matter afterwards. It seemed to have come by no known agency, as if it had thrilled through the air of a continent, crying itself from the mountains, dropping from the clouds, springing up from the earth. At one moment there had been no war, and at the next the darkness of it covered the world. From horizon to horizon it spread, like a great net, shutting them in against their will. Nobody wanted the war in the Cape Colony, for no man's hand was against his brother, except on private and personal matters, and suddenly, in spite of this, it had come.

The true significance of it all was not apparent to Sanni at first. She was feeling depressed and lonely, because Willem had just been transferred to another branch of the Bank, and however many children there are in a house, there is nothing that can prevent a mother from longing for one absent face. She had had so much to do for him before he left, that she had put all her other tasks on one side in order to send him out well fitted up to make a home for himself. There would be plenty of time, she thought, when he had gone, for the other things. And now that there *was* time, and the other things were pressing for immediate attention, she had no heart to turn to them, and sat often with her hands idle, thinking of Willem. Even Judith was no help to her at this time, for she had just gone to

school, and was out of the house for several hours every day, and when she did come home, was full of chat about her lessons and playmates, and a thousand things that were not intimately connected with Sanni.

But a realisation of what war meant in such a community was not long in coming. Going out to one of the local stores to buy her monthly groceries, Sanni was cut by the English wife of the Bank Manager, with whom she had hitherto had a nodding acquaintance. Other women told her of the same experience, and the children, coming home from school, seemed uncomfortable and awkward when she mentioned their friends. One day Paul had come home with a black eye, of which he would give no explanation, and she had to drag the truth from Henry. Paul had been given that black eye by an English boy, because he had refused to assert that President Kruger was a blackguard. All this trifling disagreeableness cut Sanni to the quick, for she was gentle and sensitive, and loved to be at peace with her neighbours. Across the wall, in her mother-in-law's old house, now long ago sold to strangers, she often heard the strains of Rule Britannia and God Save the King played on a tuneless piano. Pieter wanted to retaliate on their piano, but Sanni reproved him. It was an unworthy jest for a boy of nineteen. Even Henry at seventeen, she said, would not have thought of such a thing. Pieter was abashed, but not crushed, and

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Sanni could not help smiling that night as she heard him playing softly on his mouth-organ at the bottom of the garden.

It did not take long for matters to go from bad to worse. All Sarel's English clients forsook him, and several English lads went to King William's Town to try and enlist in the Cape Mounted Police. Dutch boys from various farms in the district took horses and guns and went to enlist in the Boer forces and "Verdomde Rooineks," and "Bloody Boers," were expressions often heard about the streets. Sanni began to feel terribly unhappy at all this, not just uncomfortable, but really miserable. She prayed desperately for peace but without much conviction that peace would really come. It did not seem possible that the Boers, a mere handful of untrained men with no organisation and no supplies, could beat the English. True, they had beaten them before, and there wasn't a Boer in the whole of the Cape Colony, who did not use the word Majuba very often and very confidently in those first few months of war. But Sanni was sure that this Boer War would not be like the other Boer War. She knew the bravery of the Boers, and their endurance, and their entire inability to know when they are beaten. She was of their blood, and she saw that they would rather die than give in and bow their obstinate stiff necks in submission. She longed for their victory over the English, who to her were only foreigners, but she

knew that such longing was foredoomed to disappointment.

Dreadful things began to happen in the neighbourhood. The young rebels who stole away to join the Boer Commandos were in one or two cases caught and hanged in the common jail, a frightful disgrace. One had even been brought back to Verdriet and kept in the jail there until he had been sentenced, and taken away again to be hanged at a garrison town not far away. To the Karoo Dutchman, a jail is a place for thieves and murderers, outcast Hottentots mainly, the scum of the earth, and to have a member of his family within those sombre walls was worse than death. No Dutchman can stand disgrace, or what he considers disgrace. He can endure privations of body and soul that a more civilised man might believe almost impossible, but from a blot upon his honour he can never recover. Sanni trembled lest Adam or David might be seized with the mad intention of fighting. Adam was the more likely of the two, for his wife Rosanne was bitterly pro-Boer, while David's wife Minnie and she quarrelled vehemently and were not on speaking terms. Sanni had gone out to the farm to try and patch up the quarrel, but had only ended by embroiling herself with both of them, and had to return home disconsolate. Gone were the golden days of Peace and Plenty. Never again would they be more than a memory to her, and at that time they were a memory that was often dimmed by the

dark outline of fate. So preoccupied was she with her fears for Adam, that she did not notice what was going on in her own household, and woke one morning to find that the stable was empty and that Pieter and Henry had taken their father's guns and had ridden away.

She knew, even as she heard the news, that she would never see either of them again, though she prayed most earnestly that God would return them to her and forgive them. And as month succeeded month, and no word came, she aged visibly. It was not a shattering blow to her when she heard that Pieter had been shot at Laingsburg and even when a stray tale came of Henry's death a little later, she did not give way. She had been broken when the boys had gone, by the certainty that she had lost them for ever, and the mere information imparted by strangers could not bear more testimony to their end, than the voice of her own heart. Sarel too aged, for he had been proud of his sons, and in his own way had loved them. He had a certain satisfaction in the fact that they had fought on the side of what he considered Justice, but there is no Justice that will set a son again in his father's house when an English bullet has found his heart.

Sarel had had heavy money losses from unwise speculation in the early days of the War, and his business was making little or nothing, for it derived its revenue largely from litigation on such subjects as water-rights and farm divisions, and at this time

the position of the farmers was too serious for them to engage even in their favourite pastime of going to law with one another. He was obliged to sell the house on the Market Square, which had belonged to his family for generations, and to buy a small one on a side street further from the centre of the town, and more suited to his altered position.

Sanni was very unhappy in the new house, but at that time she would have been unhappy anywhere, and the added anxiety of making both ends meet, made very little difference to her mental outlook. She would sit on the front stoep at evening, knitting socks for Sarel or Paul in the darkness, so that no needless candle should make its inroad on her shabby pursè, and think about her sons who were lying dead under that same unchanging sky. She thought of Adam's household and David's, set so close together, and so far from all other human habitation, and yet in spirit so apart and so distant from one another. For the first time in their lives her twin sons were torn from one another's constant companionship, by the tongues of their wives. Her grandchildren were being reared to hate one another. That was the keynote of everything, Hate. She thought of Hate as of a terrible disease, more dreadful than madness, cutting out all love and kindness and sympathy, like a shutter closing out the light of day. But even through a shutter, a little light can come. It finds chinks, and crevices, and forces its way through, so that in even the

darkest house there must, so long as the sun is shining outside, be at least a pale twilight. Hate was worse than the shutter, for there were no chinks and crevices in the structure that the people who hated one another built up around themselves. It was solid, and dark, and noisome. It was silent, too, like a tomb that has been walled up. It was the only thing, she thought, that would separate us from the love of God. It was the sin against the Holy Ghost, of which there was no forgiveness. All around her she felt waves of Hate, pulsing through the air, sickly and certain. Wherever she went, Hate caught at her feet and entangled them, like a poisonous vine. It fell upon her like mist, and reached to her out of great distances. Her whole world seemed full of Hate, trying to drag her into itself, she, who had never hated anyone, could never hate anyone. The English people in Verdriet cut her because she was a Boer. The Dutch women were cool to her, and called her pro-English, because she refused to be bitter, even to those upon whose hands was the stain of her sons' blood. Wherever she looked, there was no friendly face, no kindly hand. Sarel was dull and preoccupied. She could no longer visit Adam and David, for they had no horses, and the Cape cart had been sold. In her extremity of loneliness, she turned more passionately than ever to her children, Paul and Judith.

Here again, she was thrown back upon herself. Paul, a sensitive boy, was taking the years of his

adolescence harder than his brothers had done, and seemed to shut himself up in himself, fighting out his own battles with his changing mind and body. He was moody and depressed, and missed Pieter and Henry, though he never said so. He had no friends, for the Le Roux household, owing to Sanni's attitude towards the War, was suspect on all sides. Frans, who might have been some use to her in this extremity, had left home when the change of house had taken place, and was boarding at a private hotel near the school. He was desperately in love with the woman who kept it, a widow years older than himself, who had few attractions, and encouraged his addresses, though he was not a suitor of any eligibility. Judith too was developing early, and though hardly adolescent could no longer be called a baby. At eleven years old she had attained a precocious maturity of outlook, which sometimes horrified Sanni, and would talk openly about her admirers, as she designated the little boys who were in her class at school.

Instinctively Sanni turned again to her Church, and her God. In Them alone she could find relief. It seemed to her that every bullet shot from a rifle in this dreadful war found its home in the body of the crucified Christ, increasing His agony a thousand-fold. He had died for the world, to save it, and it refused its own salvation. She spent long hours upon her knees, the tears in her eyes, or streaming down her face, engaged in pleading for the coming

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of peace. And Spring turned into Summer, Summer to Autumn, Autumn to Winter, and Winter to Spring again, and still peace did not come.

IV

AFTER a struggle which made them the admiration of the world, the Boers yielded. By some mental trickery difficult to follow, the Dutchmen of Verdriet made it perfectly plain to themselves that the English had not won the War and the Boers had not been beaten. Apparently they would not consider the Boers had been beaten as long as there was one man left on Commando. The English people of Verdriet rejoiced at an overwhelming British victory. There seemed little purpose in either section of the population attempting to force its views upon the other, for though peace had come, and there had been joy-bells from the churches, and a great deal of hand-shaking between people who had been apparently unaware of each other's existence for some years, though they had walked daily along the same familiar streets in full view of one another, much had been said and done that was past mending. The old atmosphere of amiability was gone for ever. No longer were the people of Verdriet grouped together under that common heading. They were now English and Dutch, as sharply divided as if the English had had black hair and the Dutch red, and the time when they would jointly

have been called South Africans was pushed out of sight, indefinitely into the future.

The Boer War was the death-blow to the Dutch in South Africa. The nation which had been cradled in the castle Van Riebeeck built on the shores of Table Bay, had come to the beginning of its end. A million people in South Africa to-day, Dutch-speaking, Dutch-thinking, the direct descendants of Dutchmen, believe that from their loins will spring a nation which will be able to maintain South Africa for the Afrikaners, and by Afrikaners they mean white men of their blood, speaking Afrikaans. Such a hope can never be realised. A million people in a country the size of South Africa could only maintain the integrity of their nationality, if they could increase fast enough to swamp the immigrants whom an over-crowded Europe must push to their shores. More than this, they must be so strong in themselves that they will not absorb any characteristics from that in-rushing tide. Four provinces, united only in name, peopled by a mere handful of white men, would have to set themselves successfully against the expansion of the world. If the Romans were the fathers of the Italians of to-day, then perhaps the Boers may claim to be the fathers of the South Africans of the future, but in reality the men who fought Britain in the Boer War will soon all be dead, and a different breed of men will take their places.

Verdriet tried to settle itself down into its old

ways after the excitement of the Peace had died away. On the surface it was successful enough, but there were one or two families which seemed too old to move with the new times, and the Le Roux family was among these. For a few months after the end of the War matters went on comparatively smoothly, but Sarel's business continued to dwindle, and although there was a financial boom in the country at that time he did not seem able to take advantage of it. Sanni thanked God that the War was over, and hoped for another period of uneventful life, but her hopes were again to be dashed to the ground, and this time her faith in the justice of God, and even in the mercy of Christ, was sorely shaken.

One windy day in March, four neighbours carried Sarel Le Roux's body in at his front door for the last time. He had died of apoplexy in his office, the stroke having been brought on by a fit of rage into which he had fallen on reading a letter that had arrived by the morning post. Sanni accepted Sarel's death as she had accepted other blows of destiny, seeing in them the hand of God chastising her because He loved her, and by such chastisement making her His more worthy servant. But when she read the letter which had been the cause of his death, her heart turned sick in her breast, and she could no longer cry out and throw herself upon the mercy of her Redeemer. The letter was from her son Sarel, who, after he had qualified as a doc-

tor in Edinburgh, had gone to Holland to continue his studies. From there his letters had been irregular and unsatisfactory for some time. In this letter he told his father, quite simply and boldly, that after long consideration, he had joined the Church of Rome, and decided to become a Priest.

This was the most terrible catastrophe that could possibly fall upon a woman of Sanni's temperament. For generations her forefathers had fought against the Church of Rome, for in her veins ran the blood of the Huguenots, and of those stalwart men of Holland who had invoked the aid of the sea, their mortal enemy, to rid them of their still more devilish foe, the Spaniard. The roots of Sanni's being were among the bones of people who had died for their religion, who had given up love and comfort, country, nationality, language and customs, in order to wander to a far country and worship their God in freedom. The cells of her body were composed of the dust of men who had been murdered by the Inquisition, and the blood in her veins had always been chilled at the thought of Popery. To the Dutch Reformed Church, the Church of Rome is Anti-Christ, the Scarlet Woman, the very Abomination of Desolation, and Sanni was the true daughter of her Church. She, so tolerant of other people's feelings, so understanding of their attitudes, however foreign they might be to her own, was adamant here. She believed that by his action her son had placed himself almost beyond the reach

of redemption, and had dug for himself a pit in Hell, from which nothing could save him. She wished that she had died with his father, rather than have to live through this disgrace, even though it should have left her children parentless and her home deserted. It did not occur to her that the boy could not have taken so grave a step without undergoing a terrible spiritual battle. It did not occur to her that there was as much reason to suppose that he was right as that she was. She would have considered any temporising on such a point to be rank blasphemy, for her instinct and her principles had been shocked together. For years after this incident she omitted her son's name from her prayers, not daring to mention him to God Who she knew would one day judge him for his sin.

Sarel was buried beside his father and mother and his three infant children, in the family plot. It was a long time since there had been a funeral there, and though Sanni had gone every Sunday to put flowers on the graves of her mother-in-law and her children, she had never noticed until now how the trees had grown since the first time she went there. Visiting Sarel's grave the day after he was buried, she sat down on the dry ground beside the newly-turned earth, and looked at the flowers withering on Sarel's wreaths. The last time she had been in the graveyard she had been there with Sarel, only five days ago, for it had been his custom to walk there with her on Sunday afternoons. Ever

since his mother died he had made this pilgrimage, though it had long become a habit whose original significance was lost. Only five days ago. It could not be only five days ago. Five days ago she had not known about her son, though his downfall must have been effected weeks before. Still, she had not known of it, and what one does not know, one does not mourn. Last Sunday when she had watered the violets on her children's graves, the family of Le Roux was undisgraced, upright, and honourable in the sight of God and Man, and now it was so blackened and besmirched, that surely even God Himself could not bear to look at it. And Sarel was dead, dead with that awful thought in his heart, the awful words of that letter printed on his brain. If only she could have saved him that: if only he could have died before the letter came. If only she herself could have taken the blow, instead of her husband. He had never deserved this. He had always been so noble and so good. Like all women, Sanni forgot evil as easily as she remembered good in those she loved. She resolutely shut the eyes of her mind to Sarel's violence, his obstinacy, his spite, his stupidity, his petty hatred of his neighbours when they thwarted him, or even disagreed with him in argument. She cut his quarrel with his mother out of her memory, as though it had never happened. She ignored his harshness and slights towards herself. There was no spot upon the beautiful vision of Sarel which she conjured up. He had

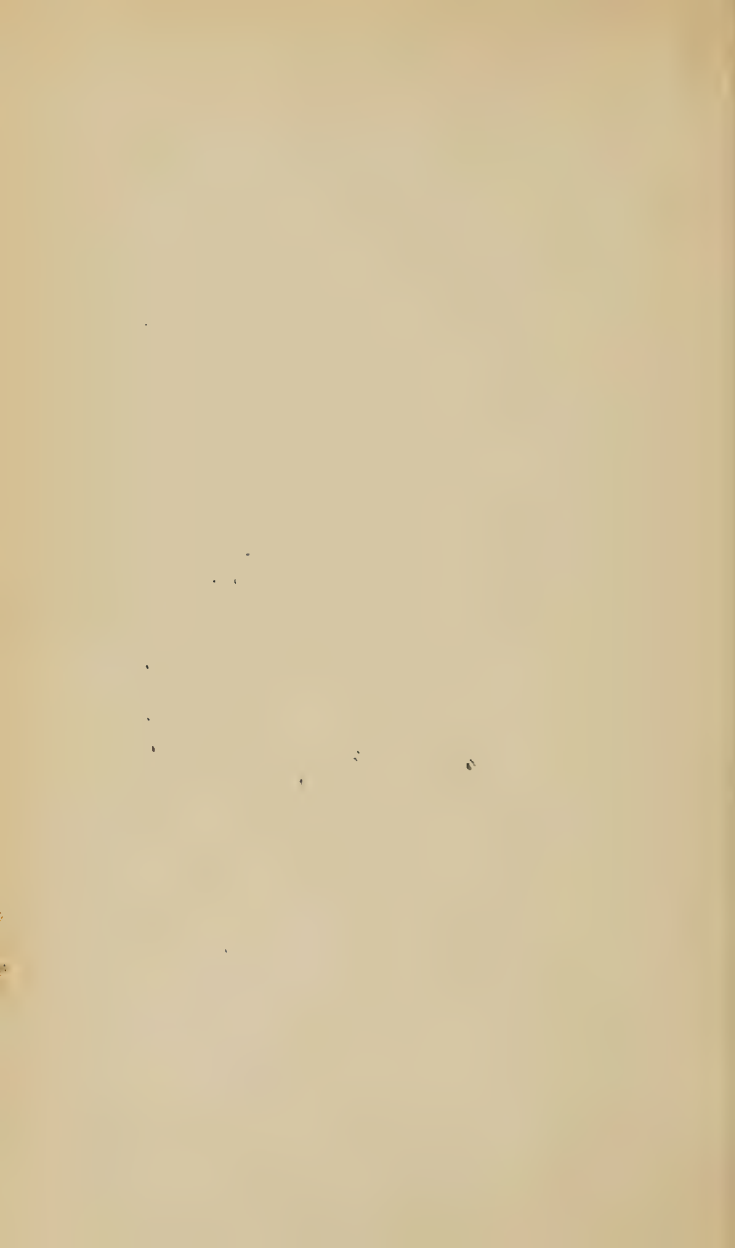
been perfect, the model of all husbands and fathers who had ever been in the world, or would ever be in it. An exemplary son, a virtuous citizen, a pattern of perfection for Heaven and Earth to copy ; and yet, even to him, to this one sublime human being, this shattering blow had come. It did not seem possible, but it *was* possible. More, it was an accomplished fact.

The marble cross at the head of her mother-in-law's grave caught her attention for a moment. Sarel had selected the text which adorned it. Where in the whole Bible would she find a text good enough for Sarel ? He would have to have a tombstone, a granite slab, perhaps, with gold letters ; or a cross ; or a weeping angel with a sheaf of flowers. No, none of these seemed to typify Sarel. A funeral urn meant nothing. She knew. She would have for Sarel, a great column of polished stone, broken off, symbolising his upright life, and sudden, dreadful end. He was like some huge tree blasted by lightning. One moment proud in the vigour of his middle-age, for he seemed hardly yet past it, and the next nothing but so many stone of decaying matter. ' The grass groweth up and is cut down.' Sanni cried gently, and the tears rolled down her face, and on to the withered flowers of the home-made wreaths, with their foundations of privet and ivy sewn upon cardboard circles, and tied with white and purple ribbons, the pitiful decorations that Sorrow pins upon the breast of Death. She

thought how like they were to life itself, cut from their parent trees, and bound into shape upon a conventional foundation, and there withering, day by day and week by week ; not removed until so many suns had dried them that they had almost returned, as dust, to the parent dust about them. Slowly and with difficulty she rose to go. It was time she got back home to prepare supper for Paul and Judith. Quietly and purposefully she walked between the cypresses. On either hand mournful pieces of masonry bore tribute to the unvarying virtue of the dead. The sun had set, and a grey darkness seemed to linger among the graves. On several of them, were wreaths of china flowers in glass cases like inverted goldfish bowls. They looked like bubbles coming out of the earth. Sanni was the last person to leave the graveyard and she closed the gate behind her. The latch fell into its socket with a sound like a groan.

BOOK

V



B O O K V

THERE was a family council in Sarel Le Roux's office on the following day. Willem had been hastily telegraphed for, and Adam and David with their wives had come in from the farm. The meeting was held in the afternoon so that Frans might be present at it. The only brother who was excluded from the conclave was Paul, who was too young to join in so serious a discussion.

Rosanne and Minnie, who had sunk their differences on the declaration of peace, were sitting with Sanni, helping her in the construction of her widow's weeds. Rosanne was a tall thin woman, with a long upper lip and sparse hair gathered together into a forbidding knot on the top of her head, but Minnie was fat and rosy and placid, and dressed in what the Verdriet dressmaker considered the height of fashion. The farm was doing fairly well, and David had the quality, unusual in a Dutchman, of being liberal with his money towards his womenfolk.

Down in the office Willem had taken charge of affairs. He was getting on very well in the Bank, and was still a bachelor, though he had long ago passed the salary-mark which enables a bank official to marry. He was inclined to stoutness and

was handsome in a florid way. He wore a gold watch-chain attached to a silver watch in his waist-coat pocket. He had the English habit of jingling change in his trouser-pocket too, which irritated Adam and David. They were not so cultivated as Willem and regarded him with some suspicion as being a Townsman, while they were farmers, and each of them felt that he had a right to direct the proceedings, and that Willem was usurping that right. In their newly consolidated friendship, they were hostile to their two younger brothers, who looked so different from them in their town clothes, with their English ways. They became more and more sullenly silent, and a cloud seemed to settle down in the little office, as if it was apart from the gold day outside.

Frans sat in a corner, holding his Panama hat on his knees, and occasionally smoothing his long drooping moustache with one hand. Out of respect for his father he wore a black necktie and had omitted his customary buttonhole. He was more insignificant-looking than his brothers, and had a gentle and wilting appearance, as if he had been left out too long in the sun. He was no disciplinarian, though a good teacher, and the children in his class at school were rowdy and difficult to manage. He and Willem wore every day the stiff collars which Adam and David reserved for *Nachtmaal*, and very seldom found it necessary to speak Dutch. Frans looked enviously at Willem's watch-chain.

His was only silver and could not compare with Willem's for magnificence, though it had two or three trinkets dangling from it, where it passed through the buttonhole of his waistcoat. He was very glad that he had a moustache like Willem also, instead of a beard. Beards were unsightly and old-fashioned, whether they were close-cropped like David's, or abundant and flowing like Adam's. He was glad, too, that he had plenty of hair. Willem and David were both bald ; and he did not like the pink appearance of Willem's head. A blue-bottle was dithering up and down the window-pane, making an unpleasant buzzing noise. It irritated him. Everything irritated him. Why couldn't they get on with the business they had come to discuss, without talking about this, and about that, and about the next thing ?

At last Willem led round to the subject which everybody had been thinking about since they entered the office. They were there to examine their mother's financial position, and to see what measures should be taken with regard to the 'children: Their father's will had been as muddled as the wills of lawyers often are, but as, when his debts were paid, there would be practically nothing left, that made very little difference. The small house in which he was living was mortgaged, and would have to go. Willem asked for suggestions from his brothers, though he did it more with the air of a man humouring children than one who had any

nope of help in the solution of a difficult problem. The brothers considered the question for a long time, and at last Adam and David together arrived at a conclusion. Their mother and Judith could come out to the farm and live with them alternately. Both of them had wives and large families, and the houses were small, but they were fond of their mother and they would find room for her, somewhere or other. Frans, on being asked his opinion, said that he was sure his mother would not care to leave the town, but that he thought she would be made very comfortable by his own landlady, whose boarding-house was quiet and inexpensive. He sighed a little as he made the suggestion, for he felt that if it was adopted it would not further his already poor chances of a successful attack on the lady's widowhood ; but he was a dutiful son and really loved Sanni.

Willem listened to these proposals politely. He had already a cut-and-dried plan for his mother's future. But it was better that his brothers should first explain their ideas and that he should then come forward with his own. He was a shrewd business man and something of a psychologist. He knew that his mother had lived so long without the company of other women, that she would find it hard to live in either of the ways suggested. He knew too that change and bickering grieved her deeply, even though she was in no way concerned with either ; and also that, though she would proba-

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bly conform to the wishes of her children, it would break her heart to leave Verdriet. Otherwise he would have taken her to live with him, for he too was devoted to Sanni, and would have been very glad to have had her with him always. His suggestion was, that he should buy a house in the new Western part of the town, where many small modern bungalows had lately sprung up. He would furnish it, Adam and David should be responsible for their mother's living expenses, and Frans should take care of the education of Paul and Judith. Judith's diamond, which her father had intended for her dowry, should be sold, and the proceeds of the sale invested in her name. He knew there might be difficulty in getting rid of the stone, for Sarel Le Roux had never taken the trouble to get a permit for it, and in the Cape Colony the law prohibited the possession of uncut diamonds. However, the documents which accompanied Judith had been retained in his father's safe and he had found them that morning. They would make things easier.

Ever since the funeral he had been busy at the task of bringing some order into the confusion of Sarel's papers, for there was much in the safe that was valueless, and little that was interesting. At last, however, the business had been completed, and Willem laid before his brothers as adequate a statement as he could of their father's estate.

It is not in the nature of a Boer to accept any proposal without a great deal of argument, and the

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brothers wrangled about details and discussed trivialities until the shadows lengthened, and the rays of the setting sun poured in at the office window. Outside, against the wall, sat the old Hottentot, Solomon. He was so wrinkled and dirty and shrunken that it was impossible to make any guess at his age. He sat quite still, not even listening to the words which sometimes floated out of the window, for the voice to which he had loved to listen had been stilled for ever. His old master was dead. He had carried Sarel in his arms as a baby. He had lived with him all his life and seen him every day. At a respectful distance, so as not to interfere with the white people, he had followed Sarel's funeral; and now he had no further interest in the world. Sarel had cursed him, and whipped him, and kicked him, and often cruelly mishandled him, but the Hottentot knew his master, and loved him with every fibre of his ugly yellow body. He looked like a little monkey as he sat in the slanting sunshine. His hairless face was seamed and scarred with the wear and tear of his unnumbered years. The once black tufts of wool on his flat head were a dirty white with age. He looked incredibly old and frail and shrivelled, like a stale walnut. It seemed as if the wind might blow through his tattered rags without finding inside them any body to resist it. His life was over and he sat in the sun, waiting to die. In one ear a tiny brass earring dangled forlornly. He was a pitiful little object and if he did

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not die, what would happen to him? His master was dead.

Sanni sat with Rosanne and Minnie, drinking the thin sweet coffee that old Sophie had brought in. She had exhausted all her subjects of conversation long ago, and was wondering how soon Adam and David would come and take their wives away. She was tired of their senseless chatter. It went in at one ear and out at the other, for she could not fix her mind on anything. She was worried as to her future, and had no idea as to what would become of her. She knew instinctively that she would do what the children thought best. They were young and she was old. They were men and she was a woman. Willem at least had travelled, and she for nearly fifty years had never left Verdriet. They must know better than she, and they were very good sons. God, Who had taken much, had left much. She had lost her husband, but would find him again waiting for her on the other side of the grave. She had lost her son, Sarel, and him she feared she would never find again, but she had still five good sons and many little grandchildren, and Judith. Her heart warmed as she thought of Judith, so pretty and plump and full of life. She would grow up into a nice good girl and marry a worthy husband and live in Verdriet as happily as God allowed her. She looked ahead to Judith's future, as long years ago she had looked ahead into the future of her own unborn daughter, and saw

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Judith living a life which was a replica of her own, without its shadows. A calm, useful, fertile life, simple and satisfying.

Rosanne and Minnie were talking with lowered voices, out of respect for the dead. They wore black dresses, which suited neither of them. All the boys had black crape bands on the arms of their coats, and Adam and David had, in addition, crape bands round their hats. Sanni's dress was stiff with crape. It had been made in a hurry by the dressmaker and did not fit very well. Its boned bodice was uncomfortable and hurt her. She did not like the stiffness of the crape where it scratched her neck. She wore a cap, which had shifted obliquely on the thick masses of her hair, now at last beginning to show a few patches of grey. The light had gone out of it long ago, and it had faded to a uniform drab, though it was still long and thick.

Judith came in and kissed her cousins. She liked cousin Minnie and cousin Minnie's children. Cousin Rosanne frightened her, and quelled even her chattering tongue into silence. She fetched a footstool and sat down beside Sanni, turning her large serious blue eyes upon everything in the room. Her eyes were very wide open, which gave her a continual air of wonder, as if she were seeing things for the first time, and did not understand. She wore a white pinafore over her black dress, and her long golden curls hung over her shoulders. Every night

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Judith's hair was curled close to her head in strips of rag so that in the daytime it should fall into ringlets, and Sanni would never omit the nightly ritual, whatever the stress of circumstance. Judith's pinafore was stiffly starched, and stood out in frills at the shoulders from an embroidered yoke. She wore long black stockings and black button boots, and the frills of her calico drawers hung a little beyond the hem of her frock. She sat unusually still, looking at the pattern on the red tablecloth, and at the teacloth on it, with its lace edge crocheted by her cousin Minnie. She looked at the shining biscuit barrel with its nickel top and red and blue flowers on the china part. She looked at the white coffee-cups, fluted like a Nautilus shell. She looked at the milk jug with its net cover, edged with blue beads, to keep the flies out. Then her eyes travelled over the room. It was all quite familiar. How she wished things would not always be exactly the same. When things *did* happen she was shut out of them. Uncle had died, and except for his absence and her black dress, there was no change. She looked down at the brass toe-guards on her boots, and felt completely bored.

II

WILLEM was as good as his word. After he had had his supper that night in the Commercial Hotel, the only building in Verdriet at that time which could

boast of a double storey, he had walked over to see his mother, admiring on his way the signs of advancement which he saw around him. Two of the shops had plate-glass windows ; and one of them even a wax female figure, displaying, in a forbidding attitude, a garment which it described as ' Straight from Paris.' Willem remembered that shop ; as a child he had often flattened his nose against its window, which contained tops and balls of twine, elastic for catapults, long strings of black liquorice, and sugar candy which stuck like crystals of rock about a central thread. There had been jars of sweets, too, conversation-peppermints in different colours and shapes, pink hearts and yellow diamonds with printed inscriptions, such as ' I love you,' or ' You are my Sweetheart.' There had been aniseed balls and bulls-eyes, jujubes and changing-sweets, so called because each time you took them out of your mouth to look at them, they were a different colour. And through this conglomeration of childish treasure, he had been able to look into the shop itself. There had been one counter, and on it and above it and beyond it and around it, was grouped a diversity of merchandise,—coloured handkerchiefs, leather purses, bales of print and flannelette and calico, twists of tobacco, groceries, spades and pitchforks, harness, women's stays, children's pinafores, and from the door of the shop had issued the smell of all these things, mingled into an exotic flavour, telling of yet more delectable

visions in the darker corners beyond. Outside on the stoep of the shop had stood a plough and a harrow.

Willem stood still for a moment, and looked at it. It was bright moonlight, bright enough to read print by, and he was pleased at the change in the shop. The hardware was on one side with a window of its own, and on the other was the simpering figure, 'Straight from Paris.' This was as it should be. This was progress, civilisation. It meant money, and money meant progress and civilisation, and progress and civilisation meant *more* money, and it was all very satisfactory. He walked on down the road in the moonlight, pleased with himself and the world. He was sorry his father was dead, but his father had been an old man, though he certainly hadn't looked it. And the old must die to make place for the young. It was a pity about that scoundrelly brother of his. Thank God it had happened out of South Africa. He was sorry for his mother, though. He loved her with all the love of which his nature was capable. He had buried his affection under a mass of figures, and concealed it with ledgers and overdrafts and securities, but it had not changed and was as strong now as when he had been a small boy, sheltering behind her petticoats from his father's wrath. What a pity she had not been left better off! Still, he would do what he could for her, and he would see that those mean brothers of his, Adam and David, did something

for her too. They must have a lot of money, those two, though it was not likely they would confess to it. Well—he didn't want their money. He had enough of his own, thank God. But he was certainly going to see that his mother got some of it. As for poor old Frans, he undoubtedly was the fool of the family. Fancy sitting down in Verdriet and being a school-teacher! With a shrug of his shoulders he dismissed Frans from his mind, and quickened his pace as he came into sight of his mother's house.

Sanni had put Judith to bed, her hair in its usual bondage of knotted linen. In the living-room Paul was sitting over his lesson books. He had just passed his School Higher examination and was studying for his Matriculation. He had not yet made any decision as to his future, and his mother and father had never consulted him in the matter. He learned hard, but he was not very clever, and it often took him hours to acquire information that brighter boys would pick up in a few minutes. So he had to sit up late at night with his text-books and atlases and exercise books, trying to finish his homework, though his eyes were sunk in his head for want of sleep and he yawned continually.

Willem walked into the house, leaving the front door open behind him, for although the night was cool the passage itself was stuffy, and Willem liked fresh air, even indoors. Sanni came out of her bedroom as she heard his step and kissed him tenderly.

Then she took him into the parlour so that they should not disturb Paul. Sitting down in a bamboo chair she motioned Willem to sit on the horsehair sofa near her, and then waited quietly for him to tell her what her future was to be. She did not appear to be agitated or curious, or even very interested in that future, and was, as always, receptive and obedient to the will of God. In this case Willem was to express the will of God, and she accepted her children's offer of house and money with dignified gratitude. It did not seem to her that they were particularly generous, just as it would not have seemed to her that she was generous, if they had wanted money and she had given it to them. They were her children. She was their mother. That was all. Still, she did feel particularly grateful, not only to God but to them, that she was to continue living in a house of her own, and in Verdriet. She was accustomed to Verdriet. She had seen it grow from a fair-sized village into a small town. She had seen it isolated in the middle of the veld, with no other hold upon the world than that afforded by the faintly-marked tracks which linked it to other villages as isolated as itself. She had seen the telegraph posts go up, and the mysterious wires along which travelled messages at unheard-of speed. She had seen the railway built, which had brought so much prosperity to the whole district. Her children had been born in Verdriet. Her husband had died there. All her married life, nearly

fifty years of it, had been spent in Verdriet. She was as firmly rooted to it as the little hill to the west of the town. She had never been out of it, never ridden in that railway-train, never gone farther from the shelter of its walls than her own farm. It belonged to her as she belonged to it, indissolubly. They were bound together, and for them to have been torn apart would have been to Sanni an agonising wrench. She was not sorry to leave the house in which she had spent the last couple of years. She had never liked it. She did not like its situation nor its furniture. It had no garden to speak of and she was passionately fond of flowers, which did well for her. In the part of the town where Willem proposed to buy the house in which she was to spend the rest of her life, the buildings were planted well back from the road instead of upon it, and had gardens in front of them as well as behind. She was sure that roses would do well there, and she might even grow a few vegetables. She became quite cheerful and interested at the thought of the new house and furniture, and Willem, pleased at her interest, continued talking about them with a wealth of detail.

There was nothing he would not have given his mother if it would have made her any happier. A benign expression came on to his round face as he looked at her. Her ungainly figure was not so noticeable when she was sitting down, and in that light there seemed hardly any grey in her hair at all.

At one moment, when speaking of a painted looking-glass, she looked quite young. It was extraordinary what one could do with a little money, the happiness one could give people. He wondered if Adam and David got as much pleasure out of all their money as he did out of his. He wished they were here now—or no, he didn't. He wouldn't have minded Minnie. She was a bright little thing, but David looked like a fox, and as for Adam and that sour-faced wife of his, no one could be expected to take any pleasure in their company, and he was glad both his brothers were staying with their wives' relations. He didn't feel that they would be very good for his mother, just when she wanted cheering up, and he was the man for that. None of them took enough *trouble* about their mother. Look at that love-sick idiot, Frans, going round making sheep's eyes at a woman twice his age. It wasn't as if she even wanted to marry him. Anyone could see that. She was only holding him on a string until somebody better came along. Not that it might not do Frans some good if he married. Make a man of him, and all that. He himself didn't want to marry. He got on very well as he was. By George, it was time he went home. He mustn't tire his mother. To-morrow he would settle definitely about the house.

He got up as the clock struck ten and kissed his mother good-night. The light had gone out in the living-room, which meant that Paul had at last

come to the end of his lessons, and gone to bed. His mother saw him to the door, and kissed him again as he went down the steps, between the acacia and the casuarina, which stood one on each side of the door. They made a curious contrast, the acacia struggling upwards to a great height above the house, gaunt and wooden, with few leaves to conceal its outline, and the squat little casuarina, almost hiding its trunk under a mop of bushy grey-green hair, thick and awkward, covered with a white dust from the road. As he walked back to his hotel in the bright moonlight, Willem, in an unusually religious moment, thanked God that it was his father who had died, and not his mother.

Sanni closed the door behind him, and turned back into the parlour to fetch the lamp. She looked about her. The wall-paper was ugly and dirty. The mantelpiece, decorated with gathered folds of red velvet, clashed violently with the paper. There were one or two brackets of carved wood on the walls and each of them held a china vase, containing dried pampas grass, tied round the neck with a yellow ribbon. She thought how pretty they were, and decided that she would buy them in at the sale. There was nothing else much that she wanted to buy in; everything else was so old-fashioned. Perhaps she would buy the bamboo chair she had been sitting in that evening. It had a yellow satin cushion, hand-painted with three robin-redbreasts on a spray of apple-blossom, and was surrounded

by a flounce of lace. On the table stood a photograph album of green plush. That at least would not have to be sold. She undid its heavy clasps, and opened it at random. The pages fell apart at a photograph of Sarel, and the outlines of the room became blurred, as thick tears gathered in her eyes and ran down her face, losing themselves in the crape of her dress. With difficulty she restrained them and turned out the lamp. She could not bear to light a candle. All she wanted was the darkness pressing down on her eyes, so that she could see nothing of this house which had seemed so poor a frame for her husband, and which was now so empty without him. She felt her way to the door and across the passage to her bedroom. Opposite the door stood the double bed in which she and Sarel had been accustomed to sleep. Their only separations for nearly fifty years had been when she was in child-birth, or when Sarel had been away on one of his infrequent business trips. Night after night they had lain side by side, man and wife. And now Sarel was gone. In his place slept Judith. Slowly Sanni undressed in the darkness, the tears still running down her face. Slowly she took the pins out of her heavy hair. It was not as heavy as it used to be, but it was still abundant. Slowly she brushed it, all the time weeping noiselessly as if her heart were crying and forcing the tears from her eyes lest it should drown in them. She knelt down by the side of the bed and began to say her prayers.

She prayed for Judith and for Paul. She prayed for Frans, and for Willem who was so kind to her, and for her twin sons and their wives and children. She prayed for her servants, old Sophie and Solomon the Hottentot. She prayed for Verdriet and all the people in it. But for her husband and her son, Sarel, and for herself, she could not pray. When she had ended her prayers, and got into bed, she lay for a long time with a heavy heart, thinking, not of the future, but of the past, until, as it drew near morning, she fell asleep.

In the morning she felt better, though her eyes were red with crying and her hands shook as she poured the boiling water from the kettle into the coffee when she prepared the breakfast. She went outside the back door, and spoke to old Solomon, telling him kindly that he need have no fear for the future, as she would look after him now that his master was gone. But he looked at her with lacklustre eyes and did not show that he heard what she had said to him.

‘He’s mad,’ whispered Sophie in an awed voice, ‘Missis, he’s crazy.’

The old man heard her whisper and looked up at her from where he sat crouched on the ground, putting his head on one side like a bird.

‘Solomon is not mad,’ he said quietly, ‘Solomon is dead.’ He turned his eyes away from her again as she shrank back from him, horrified, and continued to stare in front of him with unseeing gaze.

A VIRTUOUS WOMAN

Sanni felt more than ever depressed as she returned to the living-room and gave the children their coffee and thick slices of bread-and-dripping before they went to school. Paul looked tired and ill, she noticed. He was working too hard. Poor boy—it was a pity he was so stupid. What would become of him? And Judith? Judith looked pasty, too. She wondered that she had been able to feel so cheerful last night. It must have been because of Willem. She smiled to herself as she thought of Willem. He *was* a good boy.

III

WILLEM did not leave Verdriet as he had intended, early in the following week. He obtained further leave from his Bank and remained with his mother, feeling that Frans was not able to do for her as much as *he* could, and realising that Adam and David must return home with their wives. Sanni was delighted to have Willem with her. He put himself out to please her in a way that none of the other children did, and he seemed more or less to re-establish her credit with the townspeople. When he was there she was not the Widow Le Roux—she was the mother of Mr. Le Roux, the Bank Manager from Vosterspruit. The people whose house she went to look at with Willem were most ingratiating. The wife gave her tea in the English fashion, from a Britannia-metal teapot with a pink cosy, and ex-

A VIRTUOUS WOMAN

plained that they were only selling the house because they were leaving Verdriet to live in Cape-town. It was a very nice house—quite modern. It had a bathroom. Sanni had never before seen a house with a bathroom. Her family had always bathed in tin baths in their bedrooms, like everybody else in Verdriet. This was a great innovation. There was a tank on the roof into which you pumped water from a well in the garden, and a pipe descended from the tank into the bath. If you wanted a hot bath, of course you had to heat the water as before, in paraffin tins. But the real convenience was that when you had had your bath, you pulled a stopper out of the bottom of it, and the dirty water ran away down the pipe into the garden. Mrs. Le Roux could see out of the window how green one corner of the garden was. The house was near the public tennis-courts, too, which would be nice for Paul and Judith, and when the privet hedge had grown up a foot or two higher, one would no longer be overlooked by the next house, and it would be quite private.

In another room Willem was discussing the question of price with the owner of the house, and when this important detail was settled, they had a drink to consolidate the arrangement, quite in the English fashion, like the tea, with soda-water out of a siphon into which you first put plain water and then a bulb called a sparklet which, when pressed, aerated the contents of the siphon. It was really very remarkable.

A VIRTUOUS WOMAN

To Sanni the next three weeks seemed muddled and rushed. Willem kept her busy buying new furniture, and selling her old things, choosing wall-paper, and carpets, and linoleum, until she felt that of all the sons in the world none was so good to his mother as this one. Willem was enjoying himself too. He had never had a house of his own, and when he retired, as in the natural course of events he must do in the next twenty years, no place would be better than this to settle down in. Values would go up in Verdriet and the property would be worth more than he had paid for it. He arranged with Frans to see that at the proper time of the year good fruit-trees were planted, and vines put in on a trellis at the back of the house. He felt important and this pleased him. The people in Verdriet realised that he was a success, and deferred to what he said. When he entered a shop the owner himself always came forward to serve him. The manager of the hotel discussed the weather with him. The clergyman of the English Church had asked him for a subscription. So had the Committee of the Public Library. Willem liked this. He enjoyed being made much of. It flattered his vanity, and he decided that whenever he got leave from the Bank he would come and see his mother instead of going to Capetown or Port Elizabeth, as he had been accustomed to do. He paid a little mild attention to the landlady of Frans's boarding-house, thereby reducing his brother almost to a state of frenzy.

Frans need not have worried though, for during the winter the widow married a farmer from another district, to whom she had been engaged for two years, and the village of Verdriet saw her no more.

Willem had been really intelligent in his arrangements, for he moved his mother into her new house the day before he left Verdriet, and her sorrow at losing him was greatly minimised by her interest in her novel surroundings. The house had a verandah on two sides, and a bow window, whose lace curtains were tied with great bows of yellow ribbon. It had been a matter of considerable difficulty for Sanni to decide whether she would have the room with the bow window for her bedroom or her parlour, but the habit of years triumphed in the end, and as it was the first room on the left-hand side as you went in, it became her bedroom. It had twin brass beds in it, with yellow hangings, and a wardrobe with a looking-glass in the door. The jugs and basins were of china, and there was a yellow floral pattern on the tiles which ornamented the back of the washing-stand. There were no shutters on the windows, but green Venetian blinds hung inside them, with slats that worked in a peculiar mechanical way, and regulated the light. In the bedroom, as well as the beds and the wardrobe and the washing-stand and the dressing-table, were two small bamboo tables, a bamboo armchair and a box Ottoman. On the wall-paper was a florid design of cabbage-roses, and on the floor a complete covering

of cocoanut matting. Sanni had never seen such a beautiful room. She would not have believed, if she had not seen it with her own eyes, that such a beautiful room existed in Verdriet. In the passage was a patterned linoleum, and a hall-stand of bamboo, set with many little pieces of looking-glass. Across the middle of this passage, dividing the front part of the house from the back, hung a transparent curtain of bamboo and beads. The rest of the furniture of the house was on the same scale of magnificence. There were four rooms, in addition to the bathroom and kitchen, which contained a range, and a pantry. Outside the house were two large round tanks of corrugated iron. They caught the rain water from the roof. The well in the garden that supplied the bath-water was also used for irrigation, as in the street on which this house fronted there were no water-furrows. On three sides of the garden were planted a privet hedge, and on the fourth, to the west, a line of poplars, tall delicate trees mounting into the sky like thin green flames.

Sanni, getting into bed, in the first night after she had made the move, thanked God again and again for the manifold blessings which He had poured into her life. She knew she would be happy in that house, for so much love had gone to the redding of it. She did not notice that Willem was pompous and assertive, and a little purse-proud. She only noticed that he was generous and loving, and she thanked him from the bottom of her heart.

Almost more than she was thankful for her own sake, was Sanni thankful to Willem for the sake of Paul and Judith. She had lived her life, they were young ; and these surroundings would make a very great difference to their future. They would be able to have different friends now, and lead altogether wider and more interesting lives. Perhaps she might be able to persuade Frans to send Paul to college at Stellenbosch, or if by the grace of God he desired to join the Church, which was her earnest hope, to the Seminary at Wellington, whence that great Christian, Dr. Andrew Murray, turned out so many young men to labour in the Lord's Vineyard.

Judith was enchanted with the change in her life. She loved pretty things, and would sit for hours on a chair in the parlour, looking at its unaccustomed splendour. Owing to the passion on the child's part for the parlour, Sanni used the room a great deal more than she had ever done in either of the other houses she had lived in. When visitors came to call on her, though they would still be given coffee in the living-room, they were always ushered into the parlour on first arrival ; and Sanni smiled with innocent pleasure at their compliments on its appearance. Rosanne and Minnie too came at once to inspect the new house, and went home again consumed with envy, Rosanne to tell Adam that his brother Willem would end in the Bankruptcy Court at least if not in jail, and Minnie to henpeck her husband for furniture like that of her mother-

in-law. Several English ladies, wives of shopkeepers and auctioneers in the town, called upon Sanni for the first time. They did this in a very patronising way, feeling they were doing a kind action in visiting an uneducated old Dutchwoman ; but Sanni's heart was so simple that she did not notice their vulgarity, and her gentle courtesy soon put them at their ease, and turned them back into the friendly comfortable folk they were at home. So they came again and again, and sent their children to play with Judith, though they considered her affected and spoilt ; and Sanni found that in moving half a mile from one side of the town to the other she had completely altered her social environment.

In the winter, when Frans's widow contracted her long-delayed marriage, and sold her boarding-house, Frans, feeling that the lode-star of his life was eclipsed, came up to live with his mother. This pleased Adam and Rosanne, for Frans paid his mother five pounds a month for his board and lodging and they immediately reduced, by fifty shillings, the allowance which they paid her monthly. David and Minnie had thought of doing this, but when Minnie heard that Rosanne had been before her in the matter, she persuaded David to make no alteration in their arrangement. With Frans in the house, Sanni found that Paul got on better with his lessons, for the two brothers shared the back bedroom, and the elder would often coach the younger and help him through his difficulties.

Sanni began to be very tactful with Frans. She was not a cunning woman by nature, but the simplest animal can be cunning on behalf of its young, and Sanni was no exception to the rule. Her one ambition in life was that Paul should become a Minister of the Dutch Reformed Church. She felt in some obscure way that God would forgive her son Sarel his impious apostasy, if her son Paul became in very truth, a servant of the Lord. Sarel had gone out of her life completely. Even to herself she hardly ever mentioned his name, but now that she had had this idea that one brother might atone for the sin of the other, it became an obsession. Paul showed no noteworthy leaning towards religion, it is true, but then Paul showed no noteworthy leanings towards anything else either, and that was enough for Sanni. Had she been told that she was deliberately trying to ruin her son's life, by pushing him into a profession for which he was unsuited, she would have been deeply offended. She *knew* that there could be no greater happiness for any man than the service of God, if once God graciously permitted him to enter it. She paid a visit to the Predikant, and discussed the question with him. He replied guardedly that it might very well be possible that the Lord intended Paul to enter the Church, and that she had better send the boy along to be confirmed. Having thus gained one ally, though probably a weak one, Sanni bethought herself of Willem. She knew Frans admired Willem

tremendously and tried indeed to model himself on his brother. He did not, unfortunately, succeed very well in this, as he was by nature diffident, but his failure to achieve his brother's dashing manner only made him admire him the more. Sanni wrote to Willem.

The only two people who had no inkling of what was going on, were Frans and Paul. Frans, unaware that his pocket was about to be touched, bought himself a bicycle. He used to ride this very slowly and soberly, and went every morning to school on it. It was very original at that time to have a bicycle. The really old-fashioned variety, with a large wheel in front and small one behind, had never been seen in Verdriet, and only in the last year or two had mechanical transport been known there. Frans used to fasten his trousers round his ankles with black metal clips, attach his Panama hat to his coat collar by means of a length of eyeglass cord, and start out from the front gate every morning with a slightly furtive air, as if he were not quite sure if he would be able to get on or not. He was haunted by the fear that some of his scholars would see him hopping in the road, unable to attain the saddle, but this fortunately never happened, as he used to start very early in order to prepare his books and his classroom for the day's work. Coming back, though a more public affair, was not so difficult, for one could stand carelessly on the lowest step of the flight which led up to the

school door, and with that unsuspected mounting-block, the departure was a simple one.

Paul, also unaware of his mother's project, continued working for his Matriculation. Though he dreaded examinations he worked steadily, and with Frans's help, was fairly sure of passing. He supposed that when he left school, he would be a clerk in a Bank, or go into the Civil Service, in the Magistrate's office probably. He didn't much care. A curious mental languor had always settled on him at the thought of his future. It didn't seem to matter what one was, or what one did. Things happened to one, just the same. One couldn't evade them. Well,—let them happen.

IV

It was Judith who told Paul that he was intended for the Church. Nothing that happened in the household escaped Judith. She knew what everybody did and said and thought, and she was as mischievous as a monkey with the knowledge which she obtained—Heaven knew how—of her relations' motives and intentions. She had penetrated Frans's nervousness about his bicycle, and would insist on going to the gate with him in the mornings, walking sedately down the gravel path holding his hand. She would pick his buttonhole for him and then hold the gate open while he pushed his machine into the street. Then she would watch him with

wide-open, wondering eyes, which never seemed to blink, or to miss any detail of what was going on, until he at last gained the saddle and was riding away. She knew he was afraid of falling off, and at the dinner-table would recount how, in walking home from school with her companions, she had seen the Magistrate's clerk fall off, or the Postmaster fall off—imaginary incidents, which she embroidered in a meaning way, until Frans's meek face would turn red round his sandy moustache, and his blue eyes would water painfully. She was always jeering at Paul, too, announcing whenever they had company, that Paul had just missed being chosen for the football team, or that Paul had been tenth in his class that week. Only Sanni she never dared to trifle with, and indeed even her mean little spirit could not help but love the ungainly woman with the pleasant expression, around whom that household moved.

Sanni could see no harm in Judith. What the child did was right. She loved looking at Judith. Whether Judith was playing hop-scotch in the garden, or practising her scales on the upright piano, with its collection of ornaments jangling on the lid, or lying asleep in bed at night when Sanni herself came in to undress, Judith was always perfect. She would stand at the foot of the brass bed beside her own, watching the light of her candle flicker over Judith's face. She loved the snub little nose, the rosy mouth, the childish curves of cheek and chin

and throat, the thick straight golden eyebrows and the heavy lashes lying softly on the freckled cheeks. She looked at the knots of hair and rag that would be curls to-morrow, and she felt that she dare hardly breathe for fear that she should blow away this treasure, this joy. She would mark the outlines of Judith's shadow on the white pillowcase, the hump of Judith's body under the white honey-comb quilt, the little hand, with black spots on it where Judith was having her warts cauterised. She would watch the flannel nightgown, with its little frilled collar, the hangings of the bed, the brass rods reflecting back the candlelight from their bright surfaces, and it would seem all too marvellous to be true. She forgot that Judith was another woman's child : whose—she did not even know, and thought of her only as her own, the daughter for whom she had waited all her married life—the daughter whom ten times she had expected, through nine long months of patient pregnancy, only in the end to be disappointed. And at last, Judith had come to her, born, not of the love of Man and her own human body, but a Divine gift, born of the love of God, given to her without pain and without anxiety, the long desired, the ultimately attained. She would set the candle down beside the sleeping child, and kneeling by the bed so that her folded hands could touch the curve of Judith's body, she would pour out a torrent of grateful thanks to God, for all the beauty and joyousness and loveliness, which was life.

But however much she loved Judith, and however satisfied she seemed to be with her new life, Sanni never really got over the loss of Sarel. Things were more peaceful now that he was dead. There was no more uncertainty as to whether the friends of one day would be the enemies of the next. There was no more hustling to keep servants and children out of his way, when he came home irritable or angry. There was no more need for a thousand acts of harmless evasion and ingenuity and tact, to keep the wheels of the household running smoothly. And yet, beautiful as her new surroundings were, and happy as she was in the lives of her children, Sanni would have given them all up to live again the life she had lived with Sarel. Her first year of marriage, hard and bitter with disillusion, her next few years under the watchful eye of her mother-in-law, her long sojourn at the farm, cut off by Sarel's obstinacy from all contact with the rest of the world, the golden days after her mother-in-law's death, and the coming of Judith, even the hard painful days of the War, and subsequent peace, in the little house she had lately left—any of these she would have lived again willingly, joyfully, with Sarel. She knew what people meant when they spoke of love that comes with marriage. She knew what they meant when they spoke of one person's life being buried in another person's grave. She had everything in the world to make her happy, and she *was* happy. She was *very* happy, as happy indeed

as she had ever been, but she was not alive. She knew what old Solomon had meant when he said, in answer to Sophie, 'Solomon is not mad—he is dead.' The old servant's life, too, was in a grave not his own. Contrary to all her instincts, to all her upbringing, she felt suddenly for the first time that a Hottentot could really be a human being, and the thought astounded her. From that moment she regarded the old man in a different light, and often addressed him almost as if he had been white instead of black, a peculiarity which old Sophie noticed, and which led her to the conclusion that her mistress was getting old, and failing.

It was not to be expected that Judith should not discover Sanni's intentions with regard to Paul. She was often awake at night when Sanni came to bed, but she did not open her eyes or alter her regular breathing for she knew that if she was not asleep she would be told she ought to be, and it was not worth while arguing in the middle of the night. So she just lay and pretended to be asleep, as she should have been, and often she heard Sanni's muttered prayers. They were in Dutch, which Judith understood imperfectly, for Sanni always addressed God in the language of her childhood. But a word here and there was enough. She was glad she was not Paul. Fancy being a minister, always dressing in black, and going round telling people about their sins, and how God would hate them for being wicked. When she grew up she was

going to be very beautiful, and have dozens of admirers, and go to balls, like they had in the Town Hall, and wear a dress that uncovered her shoulders. Poor Paul! It was bad enough to have to be a man anyhow, without being a minister. Men had to work and earn money and wear hideous clothes, and she was going to wear lovely clothes, and never do any work like Aunt Sanni, who worked all day with no one to help her but old Sophie, who must be about a thousand years old and couldn't do very much, and little Clara who came in every morning to do the bedrooms—horrid untidy little thing, with her pink doek arranged like a turban round her silly flat yellow face, and curranty eyes. She would have a proper servant in a cap, like the Bank Manager's wife, and she would play the piano all day long, or crochet lace to put on her underclothes like Cousin Minnie or even make beautiful ribbon-work cushion covers, like the mothers of some of her English school-friends. She would play tennis, too, in a large floppy hat, with roses on it, and a white muslin dress with full sleeves and frills round the hem, and she would have a beautiful little waist not more than seventeen inches at the very most. Poor Paul!

And as she could not resist telling people things that she thought would annoy them, she told Paul that when he had passed his Matriculation he was to be sent to a Theological Seminary and there turned into a parson. She was very cross, because

the prospect did not seem to daunt Paul at all. He had expected something like this would happen. What did it matter if one was a parson or anything else? As a matter of fact it might be rather nice to go away down to Capetown and be a student. Sarel used to have quite good times when *he* was a student. It was funny that nobody seemed to speak about Sarel now. His letters had always been read out and talked about for a week and now, if one mentioned his name, there was a most frightful silence. Oh, well, it didn't matter very much one way or the other. Paul told Judith to shut up, and turned again to his algebra.

Sanni's letter to Willem had an answer which more than came up to her expectations. If Sanni wanted a minister in the family, she should have one, or Willem would know the reason why. If Frans would not pay for Paul he would do so himself. Short of actually *becoming* a minister himself there seemed to be nothing Willem would not do to gratify Sanni. He wrote to Frans pointing out that in spite of his mother's great religious leanings, not one of her sons had shown any intention of entering the Church. He did not refer to Sarel, as it would have been blasphemy to connect entering the Church with becoming a Roman Catholic priest, and Frans appreciated his delicacy. Now that Paul was so obviously suited to the ministry, Willem thought that Frans would agree with him that they should put their hands in their pockets and do

something practical. It was a very nice brotherly letter, and Frans was very proud to receive it. He quite agreed with Willem that something practical ought to be done about it, but he didn't like the passage about putting one's hand in one's pocket. Still, he supposed it would please Sanni, and that after all was the great thing. Now that he himself had definitely renounced any hope of marriage, his affections having been blighted beyond repair by the widow's defection, he might as well spend his money on Paul's education as anything else. So after a little thought he wrote to Willem, saying grandly that the education of the younger children had been allotted to him after his father's death, and he was not the man to try and escape from his commitments. Undoubtedly it was a wise and good thing that Paul should become a minister. He would suggest it to his mother himself, and he was sure she would not go against him in this matter. Paul also would have to be spoken to on the subject, and there again Frans anticipated no difficulty. All that was necessary should be done. He himself would cram Paul for his Matriculation even more assiduously, and as soon as the lists came out, Paul should go to the Theological Seminary at Stellenbosch.

Frans was satisfied with the letter when he had written it. He read it again before posting it, and thought it was a very fine, frank, manly, generous letter. That would show Willem *he* wasn't the only

one in the family who could do things for his mother. You would think from the way Willem wrote that he, Frans, was trying to shirk his responsibilities. Pretty idea. Why—there was nothing he wouldn't do for Sanni. It was a pity Paul was such a numskull, but after all, perhaps Hebrew and Greek were not as hard as algebra, and the boy's Latin was certainly better than his mathematics. That night Frans told Sanni that he had often wondered if it would not be a good thing to make Paul a Predikant, and inquired what she thought of the idea. Sanni, good simple soul, recognised that the hand of Willem had been at work, and blushed. But it is not only the Jesuits who believe that the end justifies the means, and so she said in a firm voice that she thought Frans's idea was a very good idea indeed, and that she was sure Paul would think so too, but where was the money to come from? Frans told her not to worry about that, as he would see to all the financial arrangements, and then she kissed him and told him that he was indeed a good son, and that the Lord would reward him. Frans felt horribly shy. He wanted to say what he felt, which was that the Lord had already rewarded him in giving him a mother like Sanni, but the words would not come; and all he could do was to kiss her, and take up his Panama hat and walk outside up and down the street for about half an hour to recover himself, while Sanni, radiant with joy at the success of her

scheme, went into the boys' bedroom to speak to Paul.

Paul was the one flat point in all this emotional disturbance. He stolidly accepted the position, refusing to be grateful to his brother for his munificence, or enthusiastic at the wonderful future which opened before him. He was quite ready to go into the Church, but he couldn't understand why everybody wanted him to be enthusiastic about it. He would work hard because his mother expected him to do so, and also because Frans insisted on it, but he wasn't going to go round as if a miracle had happened, just because his future career had been settled. He even attempted some demur at immediately starting confirmation classes, but for the first time he found that under Sanni's gentleness was a sternness harder than steel, and that her voice had a tone in it with which he was entirely unfamiliar. Again he submitted to the inevitable, and went to see the Reverend Mr. Postma, who asked him several questions which made him feel very uncomfortable indeed, and then knelt down and prayed with him. The boy felt appalled to think that one day he would have to kneel down with complete strangers and pray for them, but he plucked up heart at the thought that that time was a long way off, and that after all perhaps they taught one to do that sort of thing at the Theological Seminary. At any rate there was always the hope that he might fail his Matriculation.



BOOK

VI



B O O K VI

I

IN the year 1906 Minnie's bachelor uncle died. He was a sturdy old warrior who had come unscathed out of many a matrimonial engagement, and whose agility in evading double harness had for a long time been a source of great pride to his favourite niece. Upon dying he paid her the compliment of leaving her forty-five thousand pounds, and Minnie, who had her husband David completely under her thumb, persuaded him to sell his share of the farm to Adam and move into town. Naturally a man cannot be without something to do, so David set up as an auctioneer, which sounded busy, though it really meant very little, and Minnie who was a thoroughly competent woman, began some wire-pulling with the intention of getting him elected to Parliament. The sitting member for Verdriet was very old, and had several times announced his intention of retiring from public life, and Minnie knew perfectly well that a General Election would not be long in coming.

David was not very happy in the town. He disliked change, and missed Adam's companionship. Except during the War, when he had only been allowed to meet Adam by stealth, though their houses were less than a mile apart, he had seen his

brother every day for fifty years. Some of the bonds between them had been loosened at the time of Adam's marriage, for David did not like Rosanne, and had visited her house less often than Adam had come to his, but that trifling disturbance was as nothing compared to this. He was lonely here in Verdriet, where there were so many people, and he didn't much care for the new house, though it had the advantage of being only a stone's throw from his mother's. He didn't care much for Minnie's English friends either, and he got on better with the Dutch farmers, who came into town to discuss subjects of agricultural and political interest, than he did with the husbands of the ladies who were soon so intimate with Minnie. Minnie was pleased at this, because the farmers have votes, and she knew that David was popular with them. She herself found their wives dull and stupid, and preferred to talk English, which she did in an affected high-pitched voice, laughing a great deal and showing her magnificent teeth. She was stout and florid, with a rather blowsy prettiness that was in no way marred by approaching middle-age. She had four children, three of whom were away at college or boarding-school, the fourth, a spoilt little girl of about seven, being her mother's constant companion. She dressed the child up like a doll, in accordion-pleated silk frocks which she ordered from London, and white shoes and stockings and big lace hats, until Corinna looked more like some gew-gaw at-

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tached to her mother's person, than an individual human being. Most people liked Minnie and were pleased at her good fortune, though one or two of them felt a little sorry for David who would, they felt, have to make his mark in politics if he made it anywhere, for in his own house he was a complete nonentity. The only person who was actively annoyed by Minnie's sudden accession of wealth was Rosanne. Adam would not allow her actually to abuse his brother's wife, but when she could express her disapproval obliquely or by gesture, or even by facial expression, she did so, until Adam, for the sake of peace, forbore to mention David more than he could help, though to him also their separation was a severe blow.

Sanni was very pleased when Minnie and David moved into Verdriet and came to live so near her. She liked Minnie very much and Minnie had always liked her, except for their short embroilment during the War, when Sanni had attempted to make peace between her two daughters-in-law. Minnie was glad to have Sanni's opinion of her house, and Sanni's help in furnishing it. Sanni, on the other hand, was delighted to be of assistance to Minnie, and enjoyed the excitement the new house provided. It was curious, she thought, how one always said 'Minnie and David,' instead of 'David and Minnie.' Even she, David's mother, always thought of Minnie first, and though of course she did not love her as much as she loved her own son, she felt that in

Minnie's honest vulgarity there was a great deal that was lovable. Of course it was ridiculous how she spoilt Corinna. Sanni felt that she herself would never have been guilty of such conduct in the case of Judith, but after all, Corinna was David's child, and remained a sweet little thing in spite of her mother's pampering. How pleasant it was to have one's children round one, and to feel how well they were doing for themselves. Adam was one of the biggest farmers in the district. David was going to stand for Parliament. Willem was the head of a Bank in Vosterspruit and might soon be moved to an even higher position. Frans was Vice-Principal of the School, and her baby Paul had passed his matriculation and gone to Stellenbosch. What a wonderful thing it was to be a woman, to have borne these children, to have brought them up, and now to stand by and look at the fruit of one's labours.

One of the first things Minnie did when she had settled into her new house, was to persuade David to increase the allowance he was making to his mother. She did this partly to annoy Rosanne, who would, she knew, feel impelled to make a similar increase on Adam's behalf. There was no reason why she should not, for she could well afford to do so, but Minnie knew it would be very galling to her, because her reasons would be competitive and not generous. Also, the sight of Sanni working abashed Minnie, and seemed a further reason for increasing the allowance.

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‘ You have worked for sixty-six years,’ she said to Sanni once, ‘ surely you can sit back and rest. Let Judith do something. She’s as lazy as possible, and frightfully spoilt. Why, you even darn her stockings.’

Sanni did not like this attack on her darling, but it was impossible to be angry with Minnie, who was so good to her, so she only laughed, and said that the young had time for pleasure, but that old people should always find something to do to keep their hands busy, and that anyhow she liked darning stockings. Which was perhaps not quite true, but surely God would forgive a little lie like that. However, after that, the little girl Clara stayed all day, instead of coming in the mornings, and a native boy was engaged to look after the garden, and the odd jobs about the house.

Old Solomon and Sophie had both died, and Sanni felt that with them had gone the last links that bound her to her old life. She very seldom went outside her own front gate now, except to visit Minnie, or to go to church, where she drove every Sunday accompanied by Judith and Frans, and listened as earnestly as she had done all her life to the words of inspired wisdom that fell from the pulpit.

The church had not changed at all since she had first known it. Its whitewashed walls and tall diced windows were the same as ever. The same too, were the round pillars and the square pulpit before

which she had stood as a bride, and before which she had stood, with each of her sons in turn in her arms, offering to God the man-child she had created. Even the pattern on the carpet in front of the pulpit was the same. There was only one difference. In the old days, the embroidered fall from the Minister's velvet cushion had called almost aloud to the congregation, 'Fear Ye the Lord.' Now a less imperative legend proclaimed to the world that 'God is Love.' Between these two texts the whole of Sanni's life seemed to hinge. Apparently contradictory, she realised now in her old age, that they were the same thing. She had sat in that church before her marriage with the mother of her school-friend. She had sat in it with her husband and her children. And now she sat in it with Frans and Judith. Across the aisle sat David with Minnie and Corinna beside him. How scandalised old Mrs. Le Roux would have been, thought Sanni, if she had seen anyone come to church dressed in colours like those Minnie wore. David looked harassed by Minnie's jaunty side, and Corinna sat, a sprawling lumpish figure, sucking a little locket that hung from her neck on a gold chain. Her hat was on the back of her head, and kept in place by a chin elastic. It showed her bulging forehead, under a straight fringe, and she too had the painfully constricted artificial curls that looked like a row of sausages stuck around her head. Judith had outgrown these, and now wore her hair in a huge

Pompadour, on a frame, with a large bow of ribbon at the back of her neck. Judith was getting very grown-up. With an effort Sanni brought her thoughts back to the sermon. Sermons were not what they used to be, in the days of the Eagle. That had indeed been a Man of God. She had been as sorry when she heard of his death, as if he had been a relation of her own. What a lot of good one man could do. She hoped Paul would be like the Eagle, a great man, and one who brought many sinners back to the arms of Jesus. Only look at how he had come to fetch Sarel to his dying mother's bedside, even risking drowning in the pursuit of that one lost sheep, while, but for the grace of God, the ninety and nine in the fold might have lost their Shepherd. Sanni raised her veil, and furtively placed a peppermint in her mouth. It would never do to cough and interrupt the service.

Judith hated all this church-going. She hated the language. She hated the barren simplicity of the service. All her friends went to the English Church, and occasionally she went there with them, on Sunday nights. She liked the service there, where you knelt down and stood up and didn't just keep on sitting, whatever happened, like the women in the Dutch Reformed Church. She liked the clergyman, too. He was quite young, and handsome and he played tennis. Imagine a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church playing tennis! She wished she dared ask Sanni to let her join the English Church,

but she knew that such a request would be useless. Still, church or no church, life was getting very pleasant. Although she was only about sixteen, Sanni had let her leave school, and have private lessons in music and painting. She practised a little, but not more than she could help. She had no real talent for music, and she painted horribly. She knew her pictures were lifeless and flat, but it was fun going out with the sketching class. She liked doing copies too. One of them, a rustic bridge over an anæmic-looking river, had been so good that she had sent it to Willem, handsomely framed in gilt, for a birthday present. Willem had responded most suitably for a Bank Manager, with a ten shilling piece. Sanni had suggested saving it, but Judith was not of a saving disposition. She had bought herself some stuff for a new blouse, though she had already more clothes than she wanted. She was very anxious to put up her hair, because she was secretly in love with the English clergyman; and thought he would take more notice of her if she were a grown-up young lady, instead of still almost a school-girl, but this Sanni forbade. So much did she believe in Judith's beauty and charm, that she was convinced every man in Verdriet would desire to marry her immediately she was obviously of marriageable age. Sanni felt she could not bear to part with Judith yet. She was an old woman and she wanted to see Judith happily married before she died, but not yet. Life is so hard to

women, and Judith was so pitifully unprepared for life. She did not know Judith's real age, but the child could not be seventeen yet. Sanni forgot that she herself had been the mother of twins at seventeen. She enlisted Minnie's sympathies, for Minnie had a great deal of influence with Judith, and between them they decided that the child should put her hair up the next time Willem came to Verdriet. How wonderful it would be, thought Sanni secretly in her own heart, if Willem were to marry his cousin. It is true that Willem was nearing fifty, but to Sanni he was only her child, and after all, what did age matter? Dutch farmers continually marry girls the age of their granddaughters, and there seemed nothing incongruous to her in such an idea. It was a very fleeting fancy, though, for when Willem did come he showed so obviously that he considered Judith more as a daughter than even a cousin, that Sanni had to pack the little idea away, with many other ghosts, and she never thought seriously of it again.

Minnie had time among her multifarious activities, to take a very keen interest in Judith's future. Judith had confided to her her adolescent passion for the English Church clergyman, and though Minnie thought the idea childish and absurd, she realised that Judith was the kind of girl who either marries early or not at all. Minnie wanted Judith to marry an Englishman, and cast round her mind for a suitable one. There were not many young men

in Verdriet who could be considered at all eligible, and among them none who seemed specially attracted by Judith. It was a serious problem, Minnie thought, but not a hopeless one. It didn't matter in the least if Judith had an abortive love affair or two before settling down. Lots of people did. The great thing was to prevent Judith from actually marrying until Minnie had decided whom she should marry. In any case it wasn't going to be very pleasant for Sanni, to explain to a prospective suitor that she didn't know Judith's age, or who her mother was, or indeed even if the child were legitimate. Judith might easily choose for herself a lover who would be daunted by such ignorance as to his loved one's antecedents. Not so Minnie—she knew, or thought she knew, exactly the type of young man that would do for Judith. She would manage everything.

Little did Minnie know that deep in Judith's heart lurked an obstinacy inherited from her grandmother, which had never needed to come to the surface. Minnie might propose as she liked, but Judith would act as she chose, in defiance of the world, and although Minnie tried to laugh her out of it, Judith continued in secret to adore her clergyman, and when he was her partner at tennis and handed her the balls, she would blush prettily, and look up at him with her big wondering eyes, as if he were the most wonderful thing that ever happened. And sometimes, if his hand accidentally

touched hers when he brought her a cup of tea after the game, she would get hot all over with the sudden thrill of young blood, alive and questing.

II

WILLEM was to visit Verdriet in the winter, and when he heard that his visit was to coincide with a dance at the Town Hall, at which Judith was to put her hair up, he was delighted at the idea. He looked upon Judith almost as his own child, since he had begun to take a proprietary interest in his mother and her belongings. He had never known her much at her awkward and ugly stages, but only as a small child in the halcyon days before the War, and afterwards as a girl in her teens. He bought her a new frock and gave her a gold chain bracelet with a little padlock on the end of it, inscribed with her name. He also gave her a pair of white satin slippers, and when she was dressed in all her finery, he expressed himself as delighted at the result.

Sanni thought Judith was lovely in her new dress: it was of white silk, with a full skirt and tight bodice, and little puff sleeves that stuck up above the shoulders, and draped about the bodice was a multiplicity of laces and chiffons and artificial flowers, until it looked more like a wedding-cake than a woman. Judith's hair was curled, puffed out on the sides, and the length of it was gathered into the nape of her neck. She had long white gloves,

and wore her new curb-chain bracelet outside her glove on the right hand. She had a very pretty skin, which is unusual in South African women, but Judith had been very proud of hers always, and used to rub it with buttermilk when she thought Sanni would not notice. She felt thrilled and excited, and wondered if she would have her programme full. As they walked down to the Town Hall at eight o'clock, she confided this nervousness to Willem, but he told her not to worry as he and Frans would see that she had plenty of partners.

Frans was with them, feeling a little uncomfortable and out of it, as he always did when Willem was at home. He had dressed for the dance in a mood of gloomy silence, watching Willem's every movement. Willem had a new pair of pumps with little flat bows on the toes, and Frans regretted that he had not thought of this also. He recovered his cheerfulness for a moment as he brushed his hair. That at least Willem could not do. But this was only a momentary lightening of his gloom, and at supper he relapsed into depression again, pushing away his plate of tinned salmon with an air of disgust, and gulping down the cup of milky coffee which accompanied it, in miserable silence.

Sanni, left alone at home, sat for a long time after they had gone, reading her Bible, and thinking about the days when she, too, had first put her hair up. No—nobody had danced then, except ungodly people, people so debased that they did not

even go to church, possibly even did not say their prayers night and morning. She hoped it was right to let Judith dance, the child seemed to enjoy it so; and besides, Minnie was going, and Willem and Frans would look after her. David, of course, was too serious-minded to care for these amusements, though even he was going, and would probably play a rubber of whist in the card-room. Sanni wished he would dance, rather. Cards were the Devil's Bible, and she never allowed them inside her house. Of course, David would not play for money, but to play at all didn't seem right. She couldn't imagine where he had learnt it; for she was quite sure Adam and Rosanne had no idea of even the names of the cards. Oh, well, David was old enough to know what was right. She had brought him up in the fear of God, and now he must do as he thought good. Her mind travelled back to Judith. She never thought for very long about anything else now. How pretty Judith was, and how animated, and how young! It was wonderful to be young. She did hope Judith would not marry too early. How silly her idea about Willem had been. She herself had stepped straight from childhood into maturity, her shoulders quite unfit to bear the burdens her married life had put upon them. It would be terrible if Judith did the same thing. Minnie had spoken to her about getting Judith married to someone suitable. She hoped Minnie would be careful what she said to the child. Minnie was so

romantic. It wasn't as if Judith was exactly one of themselves, either. Sanni's eyes fixed themselves into a stare, as if they would go through the present into the past, to that dark mystery which was Judith's parentage. She knitted her brows, as if by an effort she tried to drag that long-dead woman into the light of day, as if she would dig her from her grave, and force her secret from her. Who was she? What had she been to Klaas? How had she filled that mysterious and imaginative heart with her beauty? How had she loved him enough to go away with him, alone, into dark deserted places? Had she longed also for a Reality that was beyond reality? There was no answer. The standing-lamp on the supper-table thrust its pale glass chimney through its outer shade, and Sanni noticed that it was smoking slightly. She put out her hand to turn it down, and made as if to go on with her reading, but the familiar words were only the familiar words, and there was no life in them. Somewhere, no one knew where, over twisting rivers, through mountain-passes, over ranges that seemed unscalable, Klaas and the strange woman had found out life, together. Sanni shut the book and turned out the lamp.

She went into the passage and lowered the light there. She would leave it burning until they came home from the dance. She did not lock the front door. Nobody in Verdriet ever did lock a front door. Then she went into her bedroom and looked

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at Judith's empty bed. Some sudden impulse made her fall on her knees beside it, as she had so often done when Judith was a child. She threw her arms across the bed, and laid her face against the black silk of her blouse.

'O, God!' she cried passionately. 'Make her happy. Make my little Judith happy!'

Down in the Town Hall the scene was very gay. The stage, on which were Madeira chairs for those ladies of Verdriet whose dancing-days were over, and who now came to keep a watchful eye upon their daughters, was decorated with greenery, and hung with flags. The walls were festooned with flags, and along them was a straight row of chairs on which, between the dances, couples sat stiffly, the women fanning themselves with large ostrich-feather fans. Opposite the stage was the gallery. This also was festooned with flags, and in it were various townspeople, who, though not actually *at* the dance, were anxious to see the fun. In front of the stage was the orchestra,—that is to say, a piano and a violin, which played dashing Lancers and Polkas; and even Mazurkas and Valetas occasionally among the Valses.

Willem was as good as his promise, and he and Frans brought up all the young men they knew and introduced them to Judith. These then each politely asked her for one dance and soon her programme was quite full. The English clergyman was there, though he did not dance. But he came up,

and spoke to Judith, and complimented her on her gown. Judith's cup of happiness was full. Nothing could be more marvellous than this, and she danced and chattered, and gazed at her partners with those big blue eyes, until more than one young man, after dancing with her, went out and had a glass of claret-cup in the bar, and thought that she was a deuced fine girl. Willem was a little heavy for dancing, but Frans danced well, and was indeed at his best, for he felt self-confident and light, and it pleased him to be successful where Willem failed. At twelve o'clock the dance ended, and Judith, walking home between Willem and Frans, thought that there wasn't another girl in the world so lucky as she.

Willem was inclined to be a little disagreeable, for his new pumps hurt him, and he didn't usually sit up as late as twelve o'clock; but Frans fell in with Judith's mood, and they laughed and chattered like children as they walked up the street between the poplars in the frosty starlight, with the chill, bracing air of the African night laying cold fingers against their faces, and crying unheard that they were dust, and Verdriet was dust, but that the spirit of a dark enchanted Continent permitted them to scratch the face of the land a little while before they were laid away. Soon the town slept, the last lamps were extinguished, the flames of the last candles blown out into the darkness. There was silence . . . everywhere silence. Even the poplar

trees seemed to droop their leaves, since they were asleep. The water in the furrows streamed silently, and the frogs and crickets made no noise. Over everything there was a hush. And then the frost came down suddenly, biting, and clung to whatever damp it could find, turning it to crystal, and set its seal on the plants and shrubs, shrivelling their leaves, and turning their green to black.

The dance at which Judith came out, seemed to make a great difference to Frans. As the winter wore on even Sanni noticed that he seemed more assured, that his vitality seemed greater, that he argued and laid down the law, much more in the manner of the man of the house than heretofore. She was at a loss to account for this change, so she did not think much about it, but accepted it as she accepted everything, and was pleased. Minnie was puzzled. She didn't know what to make of Frans. He had never been like this before. She thought at first he must have had his salary raised, but soon decided that it could not be that. She spoke to David about it, but David only laughed at her, and said Frans was growing up. Minnie was pettish at that, but David only laughed again, and told her not to be silly, but to keep her eyes open, and she would soon have a surprise.

And have a surprise she did, for one night when she and David were spending the evening with Sanni, Frans and Judith came in from a walk, flushed and excited, and announced to their family

that they were engaged. Sanni immediately said that it was all nonsense, and that Judith was far too young to think of marrying, but when Judith had cajoled her, and Frans had kissed her, and David had laughed at her, she relented, and after a few natural tears, declared that it was what she had always longed for.

As Minnie lay in bed that night, she gave David a curtain-lecture about the misfortunes that happen to husbands who keep things from their wives, and demanded to know how he had guessed. But he only pinched her cheek and told her that she had never given him enough credit for his brilliant brains. And then she put her head on his shoulder and went to sleep, curling up against David and honestly hoping that Judith would be half as fond of her husband as she was.

III

As Minnie had anticipated, it was not long before there was a General Election, and her hopes were realised, for David was elected as Member for Verdriet. This triumph pleased Minnie very much, for not only was David a Member of Parliament, but he was a Member of the Government Party, the Progressive Party having been ousted from power for the first time since the Boer War. There seemed no particular reason why the Dutch should ever again be out of the Government benches, and

Minnie looked forward to a great future for David. He was fifty years old, handsome, and with a winning personality and good brains. She was confident in her own ability to push him if necessary, and had no doubts as to being able to fill any position she might obtain as David's wife. She had a very shrewd idea as to the value of money, and used it with discrimination, though sometimes she could not prevent herself from ill-bred ostentation, though even this she carried off with her notable good humour and large-heartedness. Her major ambitions were for Corinna. Corinna should be remarkable, Corinna indeed was remarkable; a most precocious child, and she should have all the education which Minnie herself had been deprived of. Thank God there was plenty of money, so that it would be an easy matter to buy her the best of everything. She should have governesses, and music mistresses, and elocution mistresses, and dancing mistresses. There was nothing she should not learn to do better than other people. And when she had learned all these accomplishments to perfection, Minnie herself would take her to Oxford or Cambridge, where she should become a Senior Wrangler. Minnie had no idea what a Senior Wrangler was, but she knew it was some erudite Academical degree, and there was no height to which Corinna should not be hoisted.

Corinna liked the prospect. She hated the governesses, and made their lives a burden to them, not

so much through her own fault, as through her peculiar upbringing and her mother's spoiling, and the instructive young women changed very often. When David's family accompanied him to Capetown for the Session, Corinna had the dancing mistresses and riding masters of Minnie's dreams. But she fell off all the ponies in the riding-school, except the very tamest ones, and wept miserably if she was put up without a leading-rein. Minnie sent her to ride in her ordinary clothes, too, and Corinna went through such agonies of sensitiveness over this, that she became quite ill and the lessons had to be stopped. The dancing lessons were a failure too. Children much smaller than Corinna danced very much better than she did, for she was ungainly and had no sense of time. She was shy of the other children, and a habit of thinking, when she should have been listening, made her the despair of her teachers, and her lack of progress was a serious blow to her mother. But the idea of going to Oxford or Cambridge appealed to her, and she was continually thinking about England. She read enormously, for though Minnie herself had many friends in Verdriet, she did not think their children quite good enough for Corinna, and pleaded the child's delicateness as a reason for preventing her from playing with them.

Judith, who was very fond of Minnie, considered Corinna repulsive, a feeling which Corinna heartily reciprocated. Judith was about nineteen, but was

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not to be married for a year or two. She enjoyed life very much, for she loved society and was of an idle disposition, and both these traits were cultivated by Sanni, who liked to have the house full of young people, and who could never bear to see Judith doing any work.

The first time that Minnie went down to Capetown she took Judith with her, but the experiment was so disastrous to Sanni's peace of mind that it was never again repeated. Judith was not sorry that she was obliged to stay in Verdriet. It gave her a slight grievance, which was very pleasant, and in her heart of hearts she had not liked Capetown very much. She felt morbidly that the English people despised her for being an up-country Dutch girl, and she did not care for the Dutch people she met there. The wives and daughters of the other members of Parliament were all right, but she met no young men of any attractions, and she missed the slavish and unremitting attentions of Frans. Altogether she was very pleased when a letter from him gave her such an alarming account of Sanni's health that she was obliged to return home.

Sanni had missed Judith terribly. All the life seemed to have gone out of the house, and Frans was moody and miserable. Rosanne's daughter, who had come to look after her grandmother while Judith was away, was silent and awkward, a pretty, brainless little creature, completely overshadowed by her mother, and quite at a loss when

that imperious presence was not at hand to direct her. Her memory was not as good as it had been, Sanni found, and sometimes she forgot that this was her house. She thought that she was staying with strangers, while something dreadful was happening in her own house on the Market Square. She missed her children, and Sarel; and even letters from Paul, who was now studying to become a missionary, failed to cheer her. She persuaded Frans to drive with her to the graveyard, which was now no longer in ordinary use, for its graves were filled, and new cemeteries, one for each religious denomination, had been laid out next to the Recreation Ground beyond the station. Sanni dreaded the thought of lying there when she was dead, but of this dread she spoke to no one.

The visit to the cemetery was not very successful. Now that Sanni no longer went there every Sunday, the graves had an unkempt look, which distressed her painfully. There lay the Le Rouxs together, Sarel's father and mother, Sarel himself, and his three infant sons, enclosed in an iron railing. Hetty, divorced from her family in death as she had been in life, lay some distance away, in a plot which Andries Stastok had bought in the early months of his marriage. Sanni walked over to it, her black cloth skirt trailing behind her on the gravel. Frans followed her, anxiously. He realised, though he could not understand, the grief which was wringing her heart. She read the tombstone, a plain parabola

of marble, which said simply that in its shadow lay Hetty, the only daughter of Sarel and Susannah Le Roux, and the dearly-loved wife of Andries Stastok. It had dates on it, and a text about the Everlasting Arms, but Sanni could not see them, for her eyes were blurred with tears. She did not cry for Hetty's death, but rather for Hetty's life, of which she had known so little, and for Hetty's thoughts, of which she had known nothing. She wiped them away and went back again between the cypresses to the Le Roux graves ; three mounds with tiny crosses at their heads, the grave of her mother-in-law, the grave of her father-in-law, whom she had only once seen, the grave of Sarel. The granite pillar stood, as she had wished it, proclaiming to the world that even the strong men must bow themselves, and go to their long home. There was writing on it, but she had no need to read it, for she knew it by heart. On the surface of the grave a weed was growing, among the violet leaves. She stooped with difficulty, and pulled it out. She looked up at Frans, who laid his hand on her arm.

'Come, mother,' he said gently, and she suffered him to lead her through the little gate in the railing, and up the gravel path between the cypresses, and through the big gate of black iron that gave upon the world, and she knew as she drove away in the hired cab, that that was the last time that she would ever visit that cemetery. Not even in death could she lie by Sarel again.

Judith returned post-haste after hearing of this expedition on the part of Sanni, and soon things resumed their normal course. But from that time Sanni never felt that she had very much hold on the world. These children were no longer bound to her by any ties. Their affection for her was genuine, and she was grateful for it, but she realised that the world was no longer hers. She had outlived her life, and overstayed her welcome in it. She was nearly seventy years old. She had had twelve children, and there was no summit of joy, or pit of sorrow, which she had not known. What was there left for her? Why should she drag out an existence which was deprived of all emotion, devoid of meaning? Since Sarel's death there had been little reality in life. Now there was none. Even her children no longer seemed her children, as before. Adam and David, Willem and Frans, were men of the world, kind, helpful friends, but no longer her children. Her children were the Adam and David who had played about her feet with the baby Willem, in the days when Klaas had spoken to her of the world far away, that was a country of illusion. Her children were the Frans and Sarel, Pieter and Henry, who had played under the willow trees, in the big dam at the farm. Her children were Paul and the baby Judith, who had made laagers behind the toy ox-waggon, in the golden days before the War. And they were all dead, as completely and as utterly as the three small babies

whose very names she had almost forgotten, so long ago it seemed that they had been born and died. She forgot about her son Sarel's disgrace. It didn't seem to matter now, after so many years. Nearly ten years, and each of those years as long as ten. It seemed that the road between life and death was a very slow one, and that one had to take a great many steps between leaving the one and attaining the other. Still, God was good, and He would, in His own time, call her to Heaven, and she would find Sarel again, and her little babies, and Hetty, and her mother-in-law, and the Eagle, and all the other people who had been part of her life, and had gone out of it, sublimated and transformed into what she would have had them. Perhaps it was not really a long time, but only seemed so to her. Perhaps to God it was only a moment. She would not be ungrateful and pray to die, but she longed passionately that God would remember her, and take her to Himself.

Nobody realised that Sanni was thinking this sort of thing. They only thought that she was getting old, and not taking as much interest as formerly, in the doings of every day. She still smiled gravely when Frans discussed Paul's career with her, and looked indulgently upon Corinna when Minnie thrust the girl under her notice to recite, or play awkwardly on the old piano. She still advised Judith about her trousseau, which was approaching completion, and when Willem came to Verdriet for

his annual holiday, she still listened attentively to his stories and opinions. And all of them were wrapped up in themselves, and their new lives, and their new thoughts, and their new friends, and they didn't think that the best part of Sanni's life was in the past, and that the past was fading rapidly out of existence. Only Rosanne, who had never cared very much for her mother-in-law, now began to feel strangely drawn towards her. Rosanne did not like the house in Verdriet that Willem had bought for his mother. It was too English. She did not like Judith, and Frans, and Willem. They were too English, also. She did not like their acquaintances, their habits, their mode of life. She despised David for letting his wife lead him into all this sort of thing. She despised Minnie for bringing up her children like English children, when they had not a drop of English blood in their veins. She felt deep down in her own heart that the English people they copied despised them all as much as she did, and she was ashamed for them, though for themselves they were not ashamed. She didn't hate the English. They were probably all right in England, though she resented their presence in South Africa, which belonged to the Boers. But, instinctively, she hated those Dutch who denied their nationality like Judas, and deserted the ways of their fathers, having no respect for all the primitive power and vitality from which they had sprung, and beneath whose level they had fallen so far. She felt that

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Sanni was an easy-going woman, and had let herself be led into an impasse from which she could not now escape, and she went more often than formerly to see her, and spoke to her about the children, and the farm, and the old days of Verdriet, of which not a trace was left.

IV

THE Union of South Africa was duly accomplished, with a great deal of talk and handshaking, and flag-wagging. Old scars were covered up, old wounds amiably closed themselves. English and Dutch were going to work together for the common good of a common country. South Africa, in an incredibly short time, was going to take her stand among the nations of the world. Britain had magnanimously restored to the Boers the country she had taken from them at the beginning of the century. Millions of money had been spent, thousands of men had been killed, Britain had come perilously near to becoming the laughing-stock of Europe, and yet within a dozen years she restored to the Defenders of the Soil those few hundred square miles of territory she had wasted so much to obtain. A great deal of sickly sentiment poured forth from platforms at public meetings, and from cross-tables at public banquets, and very few people thought that perhaps everything was not as beautiful as it appeared on the surface, and that underneath a

panoply of flags and bunting, Africa stirred a little, smiling to herself.

Minnie and David were more than ever on the top of a wave of prosperity. They spent nearly all their time in Capetown now, and had lent their house to Frans and Judith, who had just got married. Rosanne's daughter was living with Sanni, and Willem often ran over in his Ford motor car, from Vosterspruit, to see his mother. Corinna was nearly twelve years old and had been sent to boarding-school, where she was very out of place and unpopular. She learned her lessons easily enough, but she was hopeless at games, and shared the unhappy family quality of being unable to make friends. She resented boarding-school. She resented the unaccustomed food. She resented sleeping in a dormitory with other children instead of in her mother's room. She resented the conversation of children of her own age. She resented the sexual indecencies that some of them discussed so furtively. Above all, she resented the discipline that made her do a given thing at a given time. Why had her mother done this to her? Why was she so cruel suddenly, when before this she had always been so kind? Why didn't her father do something? He had never interfered with her mother's treatment of her, but surely this brutality justified *some* action on his part. Why didn't God do something? Grannie was always saying that He loved little children. She didn't think much of love

that could let little children be so miserable, when, with a flash of lightning, or a thunderbolt, or even a water-spout, He could so easily destroy the whole school and everything in it. She wrote wretched letters home on the day set apart for that purpose by the school authorities, but although they made Minnie's heart ache to read them, she was not such a fool as to give way to the child, realising that sooner or later Corinna would have to come to grips with the rest of the world. David, when he had time to think about Corinna at all, took a more serious view of the matter, and spoke of doing something about it, but Minnie knew that he had too much to think about to remember the subject again until the next letter came, and that he would take no step without her consent.

Judith and Frans had been married in Sanni's parlour, which was now called the drawing-room, and the ceremony, though performed by the Dutch Reformed clergyman, was conducted in English. Paul had come up to Verdriet for the occasion, and so had Willem, who gave the bride away with great enthusiasm. Corinna had been foisted upon Judith as bridesmaid, for the wedding took place in the June holidays. Judith was too fond of Minnie to refuse the offer, but Corinna irritated her, and she wished that she had arranged to be married when the child was at school. The house was so small that only her own immediate relations were present at the service, though many friends came after-

wards and sat about in the garden, or on the verandah, or examined the presents which were laid out on the dining-room table. Sanni sat almost next to the table which separated Judith and Frans from the officiating minister. She wondered whether Judith's thoughts were what her own had been on her wedding day. It was hardly likely. Judith had grown up with Frans. *She* had barely known Sarel. Judith's married life would be spent in a house not a stone's throw away. *She* had left her home, for ever, before her marriage. Judith must be five or six years older than she was. Yes, everything was quite different. Even their clothes were not as pretty as hers had been, though Judith certainly looked very beautiful, with a little wreath of orange-blossom perched like a halo on top of her elaborately-dressed hair, the wire supports of her net-collar pushing it up under her ears, and cutting her face clearly from the dead white of her dress.

Frans looked down at his bride with a gaze almost of adoration. How wonderful it would be to spend the rest of his life loving and protecting this radiant woman! He had always been fond of her, even as a little child when she and Paul had played together. He could remember her with her hair in curl-papers. He could remember her when she had lost her front teeth, and had tried not to laugh, because she hated looking ugly. He could remember her in her hideous black stuff frock, and long black woollen stockings, when his father died. He

could remember her, a lanky awkward creature, teasing him about his bicycle. And always, always, he had loved her. It seemed as if his whole life, for the last twenty years, had been leading up to this moment. Judith was his. They had bowed their heads in acceptance of one another. He had put a ring on her finger, they were writing their names in the great book of the Church, the same book in which, more than fifty years ago, his mother and father had written theirs. . . . It was over. Judith was his.

Judith had none of Frans's exaltations over the marriage ceremony. She stood beside him placidly, secure and confident, knowing that her wedding dress must be the admiration even of Minnie, for it had come from London. She felt superior to the rest of her family. Not to Sanni, of course, for she never regarded Sanni as a person like herself at all, but as a cross between a household fixture and a being from another world. But all those others, Minnie's boys and Minnie and David themselves, and that nasty little Corinna, she felt superior to all of them. She felt superior to Adam and Rosanne. She even felt a little patronising towards Willem, though he had given her her wedding finery, and a large cheque to start housekeeping with. She felt extremely superior to Paul, for it was owing to him that her marriage had been delayed longer than she had at first anticipated. However, even Paul had at last passed his examination, and was no longer a

burden on Frans. She hoped she would enjoy her honeymoon. Frans was taking her to Johannesburg, and she had heard that it was very gay there, just like London. There were two theatres there, and any amount of other attractions for visitors. It was a long journey, but she hadn't done very much travelling, so she was sure to enjoy it. What a frightful English accent the clergyman had! He was pronouncing all his j's like y's. It had been difficult not to giggle when he called her Yudith. She felt very superior to him. She looked sideways round the room, and noted the set expressions of her relations. How they must be envying her! She looked at Frans, and catching his passionate eye, looked hastily away. She had meant to feel superior to Frans, but somehow she couldn't do it. She loved him, the silly old thing, and she supposed that was what it was that made her so lenient with his faults. What a pity it was he hadn't more money. Still, she had some. It was lucky that Willem had managed to sell that diamond so successfully. At any rate they would manage. She wasn't going to have any children, though. It would be absurd to think of such a thing for years. How funny Frans' signature looked. His hand must be shaking. She took up the pen, and somehow found that her hand was shaking too, making a cramped little signature, quite unlike her ordinary writing.

Corinna stood behind Judith, and held her bouquet and gloves, when she removed them to have

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the ring slipped on her finger. Corinna had no bouquet but a basket of flowers which stood beside her on the floor. It was a very pretty basket of fine wicker, with a long handle tied with a bow of ribbon. The flowers in it had come, with the bride's bouquet and the decorations in the house, from Port Elizabeth by train, and were not as fresh as they might have been. Corinna thought them lovely. She was very proud of being Judith's bridesmaid. She liked her dress of pink silk, and the wreath of pink rosebuds on top of the sausage-like curls, on which her mother still insisted in the holidays, though at school there was no one to put them into papers at night, and she was quite incapable of performing this office for herself. For the first time in her life, she liked Judith, and thought how pretty she was, and how round and white her arms looked in their elbow sleeves. She would be married in a dress just like that when she came back from Cambridge. Only she would be married in Capetown, not in Verdriet, and she would be married in a church too, with an organ. She started pulling faces, nervous at her unusual position, but her mother caught her eye and frowned at her, so she stopped. Weddings were lovely. The girls at school would have to listen to her when she told them about this one. The wedding-cake was perfectly beautiful. Perhaps she wouldn't tell them about this at school. Why should she? She would keep it to herself, and think about

it when the other children left her alone, and wouldn't let her play in their games, because they said she was stupid. She wasn't stupid. They were stupid. Her mother was frowning at her again. What was she doing wrong now? Oh, yes—she was biting her nails. She dropped Judith's gloves and stepped on them. She didn't notice, but swung the bouquet of roses and tuberoses backwards and forwards, until her mother reached over and took it away from her. Weddings were lovely.

Willem felt proud and happy. This was a most suitable marriage. It would keep Judith near Sanni, and be a great thing for Frans, who needed a wife to look after him. And for Judith herself it was the safest thing possible. He did not realise that young women sometimes consider things other than safety with regard to their matrimonial ventures, and had the thought of romance crossed his mind he would have looked upon it as absurd as well as dangerous. He sat down beside his mother after he had left Judith standing by the side of Frans, and carefully divided his frock coat before he did so, so as not to crease it unnecessarily. He mopped his face with his large handkerchief, feeling that the most important part of the ceremony, his part, had been well conducted. He stared round the room at his relations, and felt sorry for Adam, whose wife and daughters looked faded and dowdy beside Judith and Minnie. Even his mother looked smarter than Rosanne, for she had been induced by Minnie to

depart from her customary black for once, and wore a new grey frock, which made her look years younger. As well as looking dowdy Rosanne looked disapproving, Willem thought, though what anyone could find to disapprove of in so admirable an arrangement, he was at a loss to know. It never occurred to him even to suppose that he was included in the things Rosanne disapproved of, that she disliked his frock coat, his patent leather boots, his clean-shaven face, for he had discarded the moustache of his early years. She disapproved of the carnation in his buttonhole, and the way he talked, and his false teeth. Indeed, the only thing she *did* approve of in Willem, was his kindness to his mother, and even that she thought was extravagantly emotional. She felt sorry for Sanni, sitting there, dressed up in that grey dress that was far too young for her, and obviously chosen by Minnie. She half guessed at Sanni's thoughts, but was far from realising that Sanni did not resent the differences between her own marriage and that of Judith, but regarded them quietly, as the natural outcome of times passing. Rosanne could not understand resignation. It was a word not in her dictionary. Resignation. Surrender. Failure. These things had no part in her. She was bitter, and could hate well, and in this her nature was foreign to Sanni's, though in concentration and reconstructive ability they were greatly alike. To Sanni there was no such thing as failure, because

she never saw failure, because she never *could* see failure, because failure was outside her scope of reasoning. Her field of vision did not contain it. Rosanne did not see it, because she *would* not see it. Because, however apparent it might be, she deliberately shut her eyes to it, and once she shut her eyes to a thing, that thing was not. So she glared at Willem, when she noticed he was looking at her, and she turned her dull grey eyes on Minnie and Corinna, as if they were strange unnatural creatures she had never seen before. And she looked with approval on her own neat daughters, and with a cynical smile at Judith's finery, but it was only when her gaze rested upon Adam that there was any tenderness in it, for Adam was the only thing in the world that she really loved.

BOOK

VII



B O O K VII

I

MINNIE and David did not return to live in Verdriet. They let their house permanently to Frans and Judith, and settled in Cape-town. Naturally David had often to visit his constituency, but Minnie seldom accompanied him on these trips. Her many activities, social and charitable, filled her time; so when he was up country, David usually stayed with his mother, who always welcomed his coming, though sometimes she felt a little hurt at Minnie's neglect. David's boys were doing well in the world. One was a doctor, one an engineer, and one studying to be a chemist. They were all successes in their various ways, but still Corinna remained the apple of Minnie's eye. David would speak of her to Sanni for hours. She wasn't pretty—well, not exactly pretty, but there was something *about* her. . . . David didn't know what it was, but it was Minnie's phrase and that was good enough for him. There was something about her—an expression, a manner, a point of view, which were remarkable in a child. She was clever, too, and should pass her matriculation in 1916, and after that, Minnie had set her heart on the child's going to Cambridge. Why Cambridge, David didn't know. He didn't believe in all this higher

education for women. He didn't like blue-stockings. He thought she ought to stay at home with Minnie, who could teach her to be a good housekeeper, for as Sanni knew, Minnie was the best wife in the world. But after all, women would have their way in the end, and no good came of thwarting them.

The Great War broke out just after the birth of Judith's third child. Fate had not dealt kindly with her intention of having no children, but she had been pleased enough to see them as they came and was an affectionate, if casual, mother. Frans had not been very enthusiastic over the children either, but he was like his mother in that he always bowed to the inevitable. It was lucky that Willem had promised to make himself responsible for the boys' future. The War, he thought, was hardly likely to affect him, but it was exciting to read about it in the papers, and Judith was thrilled. Frans could understand her attitude in a way. War was always exciting. Of course it had not the same personal flavour as the Boer War. Now that really was thrilling, if you like, happening all round one, as it were. But there was something about war that got everybody worked up, even if it was only between the Russians and the Japanese, like the last one. One had to take sides whether one wanted to or not. He had been all for the Russians. In this war there was of course no question of taking sides. One's side was already taken for one by the fact

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that one lived in the Union of South Africa, that is to say, under the Union Jack. Why, one was almost English. It was disgraceful how those Germans had behaved in Belgium. Nice peaceable people he'd always heard they were. He had even known a German once and a more amiable man you could never wish to meet. He had gone over and told his mother the news as soon as he had heard it, and was disappointed to find that Sanni took no interest in it. And this, indeed, was her whole attitude towards the gigantic struggle. It simply didn't matter to her. Even when David's sons enlisted she expressed no opinion, beyond saying that she supposed young men liked fighting, but to her it always seemed very wicked and contrary to the will of God. Even when the eldest was killed at Hill 60, she did not really grieve very much, though she wrote a long and sympathetic letter to Minnie, who was overwhelmed by the blow. War or peace, these were but temporal matters to Sanni, and her mind was now fixed upon Eternity. Hannah, her granddaughter, was very religious, and she and Sanni used to pray constantly, not for the success of our arms in France and Flanders, but for the coming of Christ and the New Jerusalem. Judith, not being very prayerful, looked upon this practice with suspicion and felt herself cut out by Hannah. She did not particularly want Sanni's affection, but she hated to think that Hannah should usurp the place that had been hers.

During the War, Willem had not as much time as formerly for visiting his mother. The financial condition of the country was very unsettled, so he had a great deal of bank business to attend to. He was also Chairman of the Local Recruiting Committee and the Red Cross Depot. However, between 1914 and 1918 he made two flying trips to Verdriet, just to satisfy himself that things were going on as they should be. He found the town very unsettled. The Dutch members of the community were not unanimous in adopting Frans's view that their side in the struggle was taken for them. Many of them were openly Pro-German, and a large number of others were discontentedly asking why their sons should fight for a nation against whom they themselves had fought less than twenty years ago. Politicians travelling up and down the country widened the breach with seditious speeches, and the district was in a fair way to rebellion. The Dutchmen of Verdriet did not actually go into rebellion at the time of the unfortunate insurrection further North, but the whole district smouldered with resentment, and Willem could see plainly that David would never be re-elected.

David himself saw this in 1917, and not being a man to remain where he was not wanted, he resigned his seat. Minnie was furious with him for doing this, but for once her cajoleries and entreaties and even her tears had no effect on him. It was the first real cloud that had come between them since

she had made him quarrel with his brother in the Boer War, and it lasted some weeks, completely damping Minnie's pleasure at receiving the M.B.E. which she did about this time. Corinna felt it keenly, for she was not accustomed to a stormy atmosphere at home, and though she was out most of the day, working in a Canteen for Visiting Troops, she felt uncomfortable and miserable at night, seeing her father sullen and silent, and her mother with her usually smiling mouth set in an ugly line. This state of tension did not last long, for Dirk, her eldest brother, was killed, and that calamity brought her parents together again.

Corinna rather welcomed the War. It seemed to make a difference, somehow. It made everything seem more alive, more vivid. Of course she was terribly sorry people were being killed, but you couldn't make an omelette without breaking eggs. She would have liked to have gone to England at once, and found work to do there. But though she had matriculated according to schedule in 1916, and consequently had to leave school, she was naturally not allowed to leave Africa. Given her choice of war-work or the Cape University, she had chosen the former, and poured out coffee all day from a large urn in the Troops' Rest-house. It was very dull, and she did not care much for the people she worked with, but at least it was doing something, living. That was what Corinna wanted—Life. She didn't care how she found it, or what it

was like when she did find it, as long as it was something that really happened. She didn't think you could find it in Africa. Everything there was so conventional and narrow. She looked critically at her mother's friends and their families. They seemed vapid, uninteresting, moribund, drifting from one thing to another, useless. They sat on Committees, or knitted socks, or got up street markets, and what for? Because everybody else was doing it too, and for no other reason whatever. If there were not a war they would be entertaining lavishly, vieing with one another in the matter of food and decoration. They would be taking hurried little trips to England, and rushing back home again, having seen nothing, and done nothing.

She was too young to understand that this unrest was only the burden of Civilisation, not peculiar to the people of her town or country, but a punishment laid upon all countries, because the progenitors of the human race partook of the Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. She was too inexperienced to see, under the placid or excitable exteriors of the people around her, the surge of human passions, dark and mysterious, throbbing between two eternities in one short moment of life. Not for a long time would she understand how all human beings copy one another, because they dare not let loose the dream which is within them, for fear of disillusion and destruction. She wanted to get away, to do something worth doing. She didn't know what,

she didn't care what. Action, adventure, life. Her parents gave her no encouragement. They seemed like everybody else, masks, marionettes, dancing to the same tune day in and day out. She had no conception of Minnie's and David's love for one another, that deep, quiet passion which was the very essence of their lives. It lay in her own home and she did not recognise it. She did not recognise Minnie's absorbing love for her, a living reality if ever there was one. She did not recognise in David's passion for honour, and hatred of being in a false position, living emotions so deep that they had their roots in the very foundations of humanity. All around her was Life reaching out its hands to her, but her young eyes turned to far horizons, and sought there the life that lay at her feet.

Away in Verdriet, Rosanne regarded the War with very different eyes. She was a subtle woman, whose mind never slept, and whose brain was always groping towards the accomplishment of her purpose. Her life was set upon two rocks, her love for Adam and her love for her country. By her country she meant every inch of ground that her forefathers, the Boers, had won from the savages that infested it, and from a Nature yet more savage. Their blood had hallowed that land for her, and she had never in her heart owed allegiance to any but to them. Now, in this war, she saw the opportunity of the Dutchman. At last, while the

attention of England was directed against a greater enemy, he could stretch out his hand and take back what was his own. She ignored the fact that what was his own had never been taken from him, and that he ruled himself, according to the wishes of the majority of his countrymen. She longed passionately to strip the Union Jack from every flag-post throughout the length and breadth of Africa, and trample its folds into the dust. She was bitterly disappointed when the Rebellion failed, but being a shrewd observer of life, she realised then that what she wanted could be gained by constitutional methods alone. Adam, who had much of his father's character, was as clay in her hands, and she woke in him a feeling of resentment which even she had hardly suspected him capable of. He addressed meetings, though hitherto he had always been a silent man, and Rosanne accompanied him as he went round the district, stirring up and fermenting it, until the result of their united labours was David's resignation from Parliament. There was a bye-election and the Member for Verdriet was again a Le Roux. This time it was Adam, standing in the Nationalist cause, who was successful.

When Minnie heard the news, she was again furious with David for having let his brother play him what she called a dirty trick. David did not quarrel with her over the matter. He was too hurt at this behaviour on the part of Adam to find any spirit for bickering. Adam, his twin, the constant

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companion of his childhood, his manhood, his middle age, to do a thing like this! He could not believe it. It must be Rosanne, and Rosanne alone, who was responsible for his brother's behaviour. Minnie agreed with him. She would always readily believe ill of Rosanne. Never had she liked the woman, and now there was no infamy which she would not cheerfully have laid at her door.

Corinna was intensely interested in this family upheaval. At last something was happening. She discussed her Aunt Rosanne with her mother, and her Uncle Adam with her father, trying to get some sort of understanding of their motives. As David loved Adam, and Minnie hated Rosanne, the view she got was a little unstable, but she seemed for the first time to penetrate between the chinks in Life's armour, and looked at the strange beast sprawling naked in its dark fastness. A less hardy spirit might have quailed at what she saw; a less blind one might have had greater understanding; but Corinna was young, and though she had the young animal's natural fear of death, she had not yet learned to be afraid of life.

II

THE Great Peace made as little difference to Sanni as the Great War had done, and 1918, a year more crowded with world-wide emotions than Civilisation had ever known before, passed into the back of

her life as unnoted as its brothers. Beyond a mild interest in Judith's youngest child, she had no human ties of any binding nature.

Few old people view death as calmly as she did. However ready most people are to leave the world they know, burdened and perplexed by its domination, when the time actually comes, there seems always some lingering cord that holds them back from the unknown darkness. The most religious man does not always die with the name of God on his lips. The greatest visionary does not always see in his last moments the figure of a welcoming angel. Little incidents, half-remembered faces, old lost memories, all jumble together and race out of the past, to jostle against each other, seeking to be the last remembered thing. A name he has not uttered for fifty years will spring to the lips of a dying man, and in the face of God he will recognise the features of a forgotten playmate.

It was not so with Sanni. Turning away from the events of the world, shattering or enthralling as these were to others, she fixed her mind continually upon a future life. She heard of the quarrel between David and Adam, but it meant no more to her than it would have done had Adam crushed the mud-wall of David's fort, when they were babies. Hannah married an earnest young Nationalist, and Rosanne's second daughter, Marta, took her place. Sanni hardly noticed the change. When Judith visited her, she could not maintain even a show of

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interest, and Judith, unaccustomed to neglect, resented this and came less often. Frans felt that he should not shorten his visits, even though his mother no longer seemed pleased to see him, so he spent two evenings a week regularly with her, sitting patiently by her side as she read her Bible with the large magnifying glass which Willem had given her.

In the summer of 1920 it became apparent to Judith that Sanni could no longer live very long. A doctor was summoned, and he corroborated Judith's opinion. So Frans wrote to his brothers that if they desired to see their mother again, it would be well for them to come hurriedly. And in answer to his letters they came, Paul from his mission-field, Willem from his Bank, Adam and David with their wives and daughters.

They arrived one by one in the hot January glare on the stoep of Sanni's house, and one by one they went inside and spoke to her. She was not in bed, but sat upright, as always, in a high-backed chair at the head of the dining-room table, her Bible opened before her. She was no longer able to read it, for her mind could not take in the words, and as they came in singly and kissed her, she showed no sign of recognising them. Even Judith's baby awoke no answering smile. Willem told her seriously and quietly that she was going to die, and asked if she wished to see any clergyman other than Paul. She made no reply. He then told her that he

had asked and obtained permission from the municipality to have her buried in the family plot, in Sarel's grave. For a moment it seemed to him that a faint light of gratitude showed in the clouded blue eyes that were so gravely gentle. But the light died, as soon as it was born, and still Sanni said no word. The following day would be her eightieth birthday, and all her sons, their differences sunk for the moment out of sight, hoped, without knowing why, that she would live to attain it.

She was put to bed early that night, and the women sat up with her by turns ; Rosanne, Hannah, Marta, Minnie, Corinna and Judith. Verdriet had no electric light so all over the room they had put candles. The windows were open, and through the slats of the Venetian blinds a faint almost imperceptible breeze moved about the lace curtains with their yellow bows, pressing the flames of the candles gently, making a curve in the orange flowers of light that blossomed at the apex of each white stem. The watches were two-hourly, and in each case, though by no premeditated arrangement, the women prayed.

Marta prayed for the soul of her grandmother : she prayed that when it flowed out of her body, it might come directly to the blessed Presence of God, there to be reunited with the souls of those that she had loved.

Corinna, taking the second watch, prayed for Life, for herself. As always, her mind was a welter

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of unsettled impressions, a fantastic, grotesque collection, moving and building. She prayed for opportunity, and wider horizons. It seemed useless to pray for her grandmother. She was not going to die. She had never lived. Eighty years in a place like this, where nothing ever happened, could not be called Life. Her grandmother had been dead ever since the day she was born.

Judith followed Corinna, and prayed for her children, and for Frans. She prayed that her sons might grow up to be as good to their mother as Sanni's sons had been to her.

Hannah followed Judith, and prayed for the new life which she was about to bring into the world.

After her came Minnie, who prayed for David, and for her son Dirk whom she would never see again.

Finally, as the grey of dawn was climbing into the sky over the rampart of mountains which lay to the East, Rosanne came to hold her last vigil with the Living, who was soon to be the Dead. The candles had guttered and faded into melted wax on the candlesticks. The thin wind of morning rattled the Venetian blinds against the windows. Between the slats showed faint ribbons of light, delicate, mysterious, and kneeling beside the bed of her mother-in-law Rosanne prayed for South Africa, prayed for her nation which she realised to be in deadly danger of extinction, prayed for the men who had planted that nation in such thorny soil,

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for the women who had watered it with their tears ; women like Sanni, who had given their bodies and their souls to the work of building up their sons and daughters, to carry on the torch of Life from their own failing hands.

Rising from her knees, she stood and looked at Sanni for a long time. Then she called in the others, though there was no need for them to come.

Sanni Le Roux was dead.



